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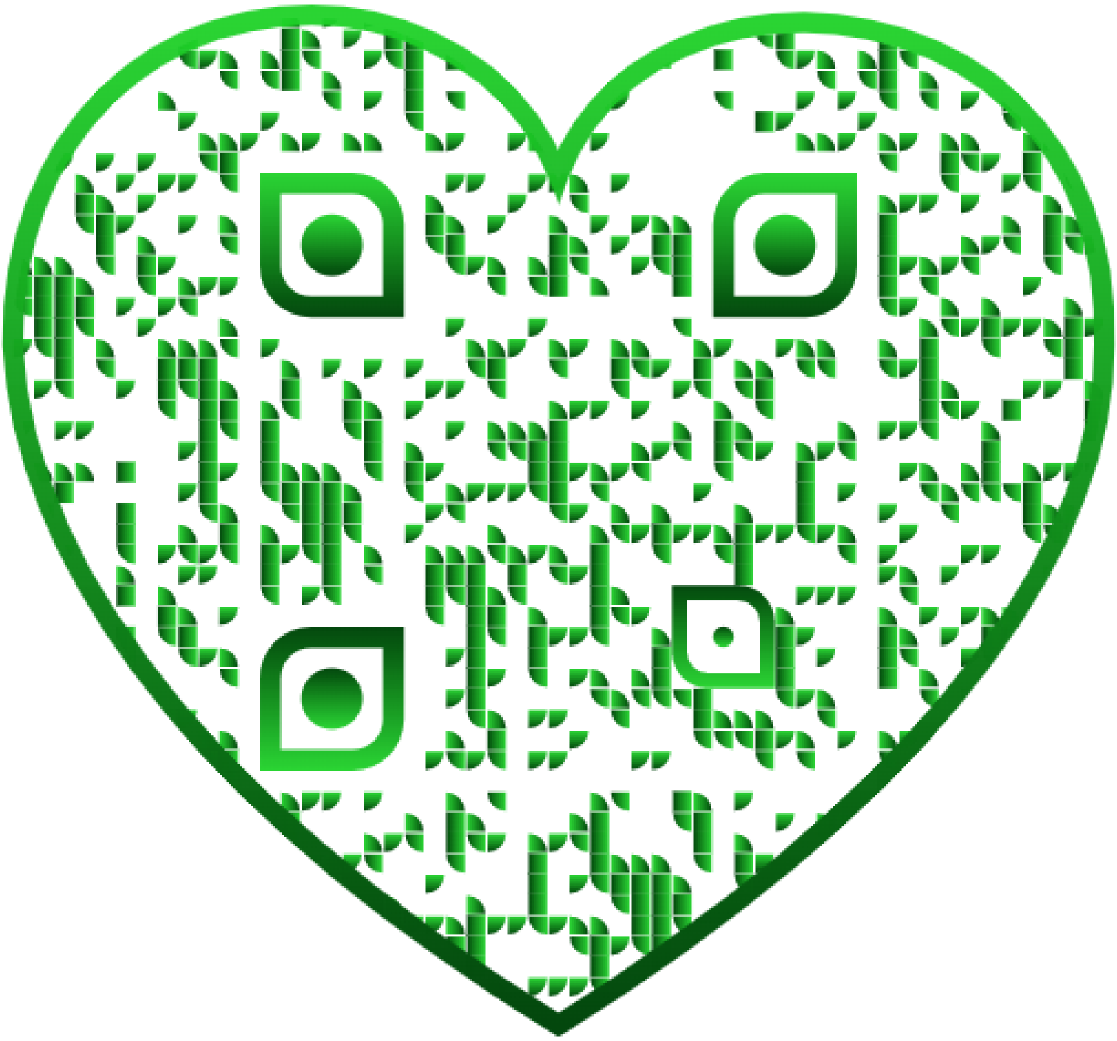

Win 2,000 to 10,000 miles[1] of free charging

with the new Škoda Elroq

Fancy getting up to 10,000 miles of free public charging[1] when you buy your next all-electric SUV? Well, Škoda's Million Mile Giveaway is the answer, offering a range of prizes to the first 475 customers who pre-order the new all-electric Škoda Elroq.

There are plenty of compelling reasons why the new Škoda Elroq should top your EV shortlist. Blending compact city-friendly SUV style with bags of interior space, it's packed with smart connected in-car tech, while offering up to 360 miles of range[2] and rapid charging that lets you top up from 10% to 80% in under 30 minutes with an ultra-rapid 145kW to 175kW DC charger.[3] All-in, it's the perfect all-electric all-rounder.

As if that wasn't enough incentive, Škoda's Million Mile Giveaway is offering from 2,000 to 10,000 free miles of public charging[1] to the first 475 customers who place an order for the new Škoda Elroq. Simply place your order, click on the link when you get the Million Mile Giveaway email, and spin-to-win to see how many miles of free public charging[1] you've won. Once you collect your new Škoda Elroq, Škoda will send you a voucher code to credit the miles to your Škoda Powerpass account.

So, whether you end up winning 2,000 miles, 4,000 miles or an astonishing 10,000 miles of free public charging[1], your journey with the Škoda Elroq gets off to an even easier – and an even more enjoyable – start.

MILLION MILE
ŠKODA
GIVEAWAY

ŠKODA
Elroq

Scan the QR code to learn more or visit
www.skoda.co.uk/finance/deals/elroq-million-mile-giveaway

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[1] UK residents, 18+. Opens [18.10.2024]. 5 x £2,500, 5 x £1,000, 465 x £500 voucher rewards available. First come, first served. Retail customers only. One claim per qualifying customer purchase. Maximum two claims per customer address. Promotion link to "spin the wheel" mechanic will be made available by email to first 475 purchasers of Škoda Elroq through an authorised Škoda agent in the UK. Entry is completed once customer has "spun the wheel" and entered all requested details in online form. Entry forfeited without reward if entry is not completed before 23:59 on 14 April 2025. Vouchers issued following vehicle handover, forfeited if not used within three years. Internet access, MyŠkoda account, and Škoda PowerPass card required.£2,500, £1,000, £500 vouchers calculated as an estimate of up to 10,000, 4,000, 2,000 miles respectively. Based on current Škoda 'PowerPass Charge Free' tariff and average VW Group model range efficiency of 3.3 miles/kWh. Tariff subject to change before voucher expiry: this may result in you getting fewer miles than 10,000/4,000/2,000 depending on when you use your voucher. The efficiency figure is based on standardised test data after the battery had been fully charged (to 100%) and may not reflect real world driving. Actual efficiency differs depending on multiple variables, including your selected vehicle and configuration, accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles, route conditions, speed, vehicle age, battery age and temperature and vehicle load. The actual number of free miles you receive may be less than the maximum stated free miles (i.e. 10,000, 4,000 or 2,000) and will depend on the actual efficiency of your selected vehicle in the real world and actual charging costs at the time you charge the vehicle.

[2] Official test (WLTP) electric range for Škoda Elroq is 232-360 miles depending on trim. Test data obtained under standardised conditions after the battery had been fully charged (to 100%). The Škoda Elroq is a battery electric vehicle requiring mains electricity for charging. Figures shown are for comparability purposes. Only compare electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend on a number of factors including the starting charge of the battery, accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles, route conditions, speed, vehicle and battery age and vehicle load. Data correct at 21/11/24.

[3] Estimated charging times for the standard specification Škoda Elroq. Test data obtained under standardised conditions for comparative purposes. Actual charge times may vary depending on the selected vehicle (and battery option, if available), age, type, condition and temperature of the charger and battery, the level of charge in the battery, the power supply, ambient temperature at the point of use and other environmental factors. The availability of ultra-rapid chargers is currently limited in the UK. They are mainly located on selected motorways and major arterial routes. These chargers are not currently available in Northern Ireland and numbers are low in Scotland, Wales and rural parts of England. Please see Zap Map or other charger location resource for further details. Data correct at 21/11/24.

COMMENT

HAPPY NEW YEAR – AND IT WILL BE, WE PROMISE

It's fitting that in an issue where resident Car of the Year juror Mark Tisshaw and road test editor Matt Saunders debate the contenders for the 2025 prize (p48), we also present our annual New Cars guide, featuring everything heading to showrooms this year (p33).

The 2025 Car of the Year shortlist includes many models you'll have read about in our New Cars guide a year ago. For example, back then we were pondering when a genuinely good, affordable EV would arrive: now the Renault 5 and Kia EV3, both award finalists, are two shining examples.

It's an illustration of this industry's relentlessness. Even at a time when car companies are having to spread themselves thinner than ever to offer multiple powertrains during a period of industry upheaval, they continue to innovate and push forward.

But forget the bigger picture: the joy of New Cars 2025 is picking out what you're most excited about driving. That's a tough call. I was swayed by the opinion of magazine editor Rachel Burgess: as a fellow hot hatch fan, I think it's got to be the Alpine A290. But then again, that Polestar 5 sounds compelling. And the new Mercedes CLA is intriguing. Then there's the Fiat Grande Panda – and so many more. Yes, I think it's going to be a good year…

James Attwood, associate editor
james.attwood@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online…

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£200k sports car special
In the latest Autocar vodcast, Matt Prior and James Disdale discuss and drive the McLaren Artura, Noble M500 and Aston Vantage.

UFO spotted (and driven)
Does Elon Musk's alien craft work on planet Earth? Mark Tisshaw heads to the US to drive Tesla's otherworldly Cybertruck.

What is a Lotus? Discuss…
We drive an EV built in China that is a Lotus, and a British-built sports car that isn't, despite how it looks and behaves on the road.

Autocar (ISSN 1355-8293 USPS 25-185) is published weekly by Haymarket Media Group, Bridge House, 69 London Road, Twickenham, TW1 3SP, United Kingdom; haymarket.com; tel +44 (0)20 8267 5000

The US annual subscription price is $190.00. Airfreight and mailing in the US by agent named World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. US postmaster: Send address changes to Autocar, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at the above address. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

Autocar magazine is also published in Estonia, Greece, India, Japan, Latvia, Korea and Thailand.

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20 MGB GT WITH A VERY DESIRABLE TWIST

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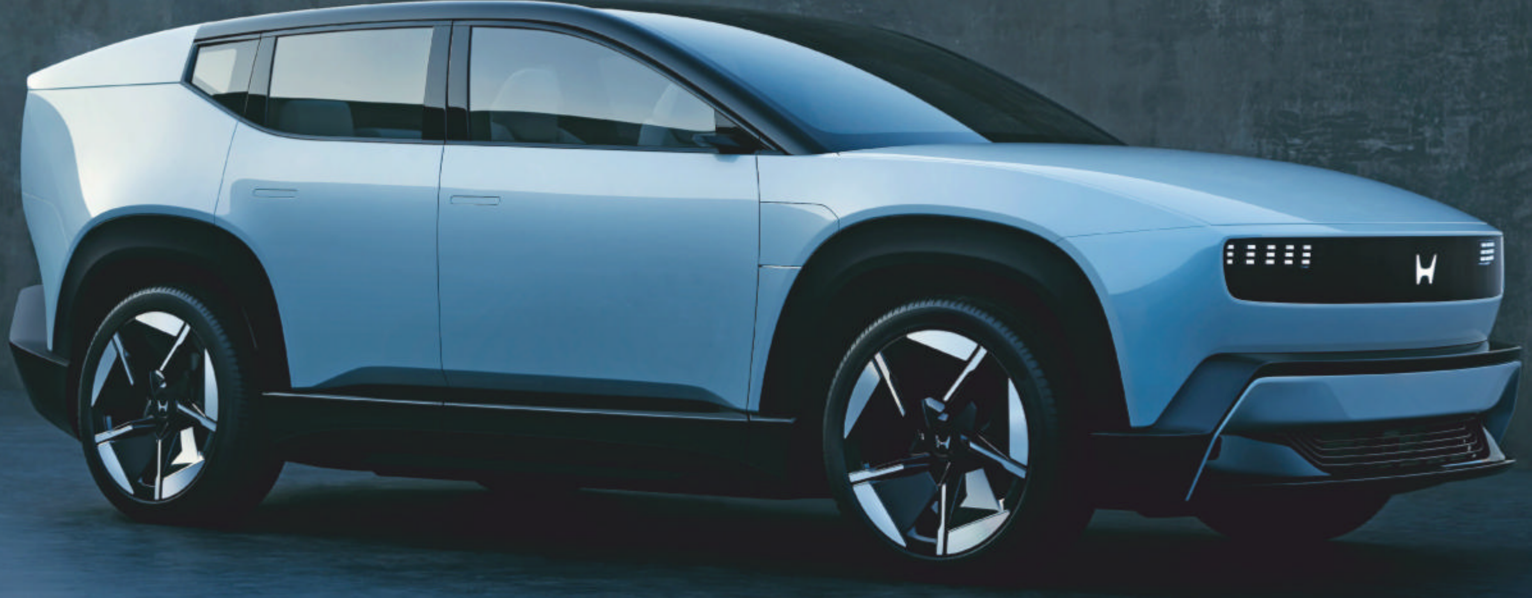
HONDA EV RANGE TO GET FUTURISTIC SUV

Showroom-bound saloon and SUV kick off high-tech new 0 Series family



Honda has ramped up preparations for its new family of next-generation 0 Series EVs by revealing full prototype versions of its radically styled Saloon and SUV.

The 0 Saloon and 0 SUV are the first of seven planned EVs that will sit on an all-new platform. Both are due to be launched in North America next year before arriving in other markets, including Europe.

Honda previewed the 0 Saloon with a concept model at the CES tech event last year. The firm returned to the Las Vegas show this week to reveal a prototype version of the saloon, which notably remains true to the concept in both exterior and interior styling, alongside the prototype SUV.

The new 0 SUV is described as being based on the Space Hub concept that Honda showed at CES last year, although it features substantially different proportions from that boxy vehicle.

Honda describes it as a "mid-size" SUV. It appears to be slightly shorter than the saloon and has a more upright, defined windscreen at the front but it is designed to maximise interior space, with a more MPV-esque rear section that features a squared-off tail.

Honda has yet to reveal any firm technical details about either car, although it has previously disclosed to Autocar key information about the platform they will sit on and the firm's upcoming EV technology (Autocar, 23 October).

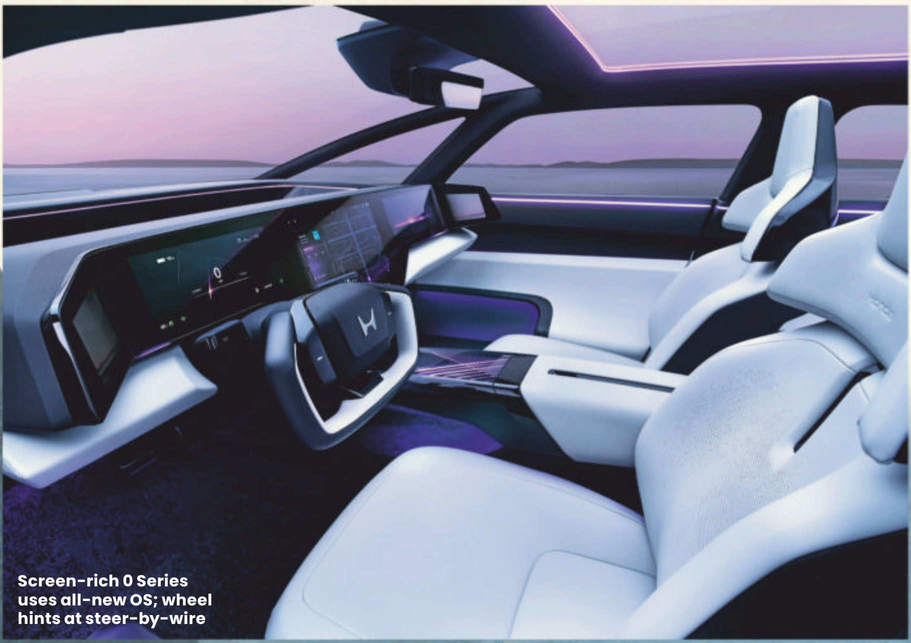
The key design philosophy of the 0 Series EV platform is "thin, light and wise". That includes a focus on making lighter battery packs that are around 8mm thinner than those used by rival firms and can be mounted lower in the platform.

Honda claims this will enable sporty handling as well as improve the interior packaging of the vehicles. That in turn means the Saloon can sit lower than some rivals and have more sculpted bodywork, helping to improve its efficiency.

All 0 Series models will be offered with single- and dual-motor powertrains, which will use new compact e-axle motors that are also designed to be mounted lower in the car. Entry-level models will feature a 241bhp motor on the rear axle, while dual-motor versions will provide four-wheel drive. Initially, top-end versions will offer a system output of around 482bhp.

The 0 Series Saloon will use a nickel-manganese-

Saloon and SUV are the first of seven 0 Series Hondas due by 2030



Screen-rich 0 Series uses all-new OS; wheel hints at steer-by-wire

HONDA AND NISSAN PLOT 2026 MERGER

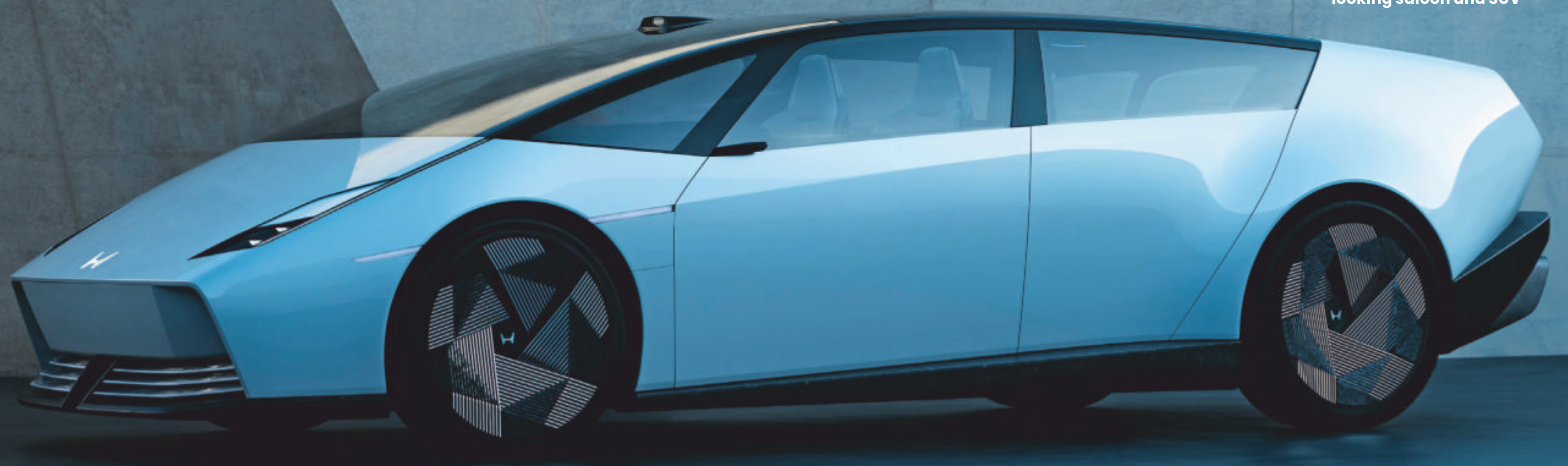
Honda and Nissan have begun talks about a shock merger that could create a new Japanese automotive powerhouse.

The two car giants signed a memorandum of understanding in late December to discuss a merger. Under the plans, a newly formed joint holding company would serve as the parent of both firms and the intention is to proceed by August 2026. Honda and Nissan have also agreed to explore the prospect of Mitsubishi Motors joining the merger talks.

Under the holding company, the brands would remain distinct but would look to standardise platforms and powertrains, combine their research and development and collaborate on manufacturing.

The Renault Group, which is Nissan's largest single shareholder and has a long-standing technical agreement that is set to include sharing EV platforms in the future, said it will "consider its options".

Honda and Nissan hope to finalise their tie-up by June 2025. They sold a combined total of nearly 7.5 million cars last year.



New platform with a thin battery underpins bold-looking saloon and SUV

> "Initially, top-end 0 Series models will offer a system output of around 482bhp"

cobalt battery with a capacity of 80-90kWh, for an estimated range of more than 300 miles. Larger models will be offered with packs of around 100kWh.

Another key technology will be megacasting, with Honda using special presses to create large sections of the platform in single cast parts, which will reduce both complexity and weight. In total, Honda claims its 0 Series models will weigh around 100kg less than current-generation EVs of a similar size.

The company has also outlined some of the cutting-edge technology that will make the 0 Series EVs 'wise', including a new software operating system that has been developed in-house and will run all the key vehicle systems. Notably, Honda has named it Asimo OS, a nod to the series of humanoid robots it has produced since 1986.

SUV's boxy rear reflects the importance placed on interior packaging

The Asimo OS will be used to integrate the various electronic control units for vehicle systems, such as automated driving and advanced driver aids, with the in-vehicle infotainment systems. It will be continuously added to via over-the-air updates.

The sporting focus of Honda models will be built on through software-controlled 3D gyro sensors, which will be used to apply stabilisation control via systems Honda says it has developed on its robots.

Honda claims 0 Series models will be capable of level-three automated driving, which allows the driver to take their hands off the wheel in certain situations. The firm previously offered level-three autonomy on the Legend with its Sensing Elite technology and claims the new system builds on that and can be utilised in a wider range of situations (where local laws allow).

The first two 0 Series models will be joined by a smaller entry-level SUV in 2026. A larger seven-seater is earmarked for 2027. Two further SUVs, described as compact and small, will follow and a compact saloon is due by 2030 too.

At CES, Honda also confirmed a new deal with Japanese semiconductor firm Renesas to develop a new high-performance system-on-chip that will be used for its subsequent next-generation models, which will arrive in the late 2020s. Honda claims it will allow for substantially faster and more advanced processing performance than in current cars, but with only a minimal increase in power consumption.

JAMES ATTWOOD

LEON TO GO ELECTRIC AS CUPRA BUILDS EV ROSTER

Updated combustion model arriving first; new role for sibling brand Seat

The Leon will go fully electric for its next generation as Cupra looks to futureproof the nameplate.

Arriving at the start of the next decade, the new Leon will be the fourth EV from the Volkswagen Group brand. It will join the forthcoming sub-€25,000 (sub-£20,800) Raval, the VW ID 5-twinned Tavascan and the Born, which is likely to enter a new generation just before the electric Leon arrives.

Before then, the current Leon, available with pure-ICE and plug-in hybrid powertrains, will be updated in line with upcoming Euro 7 emission regulations. This will allow the car to continue "well into the next decade" alongside the related Cupra Formentor, boss Wayne Griffiths told Autocar.

"The Cupra Leon and Cupra Formentor are both based on the same platform," said Griffiths. "We will extend those well into the next decade. If we want to go into the next decade, then we're always going to have to take care of those cars and revitalise them. We could expect facelifts or product improvements on both, to keep them going as long as we need to."

He added: "After that, the next generation of Leon will definitely be electric."

That EV will sit on VW's new SSP platform, which will underpin everything from superminis to sports cars from the end of the decade. This will allow the Leon to keep a similar size to the current car and slot in below the rakish Tavascan in Cupra's EV line-up.

It is also thought that the Leon could become exclusively a Cupra model, allowing Seat to focus on smaller, more affordable cars in conventional segments. According to Griffiths, such a move would enable Cupra to move further upmarket and focus on plug-in hybrids and ultimately pure EVs.

The launch next year of heavily updated versions of the Ibiza and Arona – two of Seat's stalwart models as well as its best-sellers – is expected to signal the start of the brand's repositioning. These updates, complete with hybrid technology, will allow the cars to meet the strict Euro 7 regulations as well as futureproof them for sale into the next decade.

It means mild-hybrid engines will be offered – a significant investment for smaller and less profitable models but a necessary step to continue selling affordable new cars to the mass market, where EV demand has yet to take off.

"We, like Volkswagen [has done with the Polo], want to extend the life cycles of those products, not only with the Euro 7, but also with hybridisation as well, because that's what's missing there: hybrid models," said Griffiths.

Sales of both the Ibiza and Arona rose in the UK in 2023 and Seat's overall sales have grown too. The larger Ateca and Leon are the other models in Seat's line-up – after the demise of the Tarraco – both of which are also offered with a Cupra badge.

It is possible that Seat versions of the Ateca and Leon will be dropped when they are revised, should Seat's role as a specialist in small, affordable hybrid cars be solidified off the back of the Ibiza and Arona updates.

Griffiths said the investments in the Ibiza and Arona should not be seen as Seat and Cupra backing away from EVs. Instead, it was the reality of a "need to respond to the 90% of the market that is asking for

"We won't deviate from electrification… I think we're going to see EVs taking off"

Seat could shift its focus to small, affordable cars like the Ibiza and Arona

TERRAMAR TIPPED FOR 300BHP WITH AUDI RS FIVE-POT

Cupra will launch a high-performance variant of its new Terramar touting more than 300bhp.

The crossover was unveiled in September 2024 as a rival to the BMW X1 in the hotly contested C-SUV segment.

Packing up to 268bhp, the Terramar is the last new combustion-powered car that Cupra will launch.

Now, a hotter version is in development, one that could adopt the 2.5-litre five-cylinder engine used in Audi RS models, should that unit be upgraded to meet the Euro 7 emissions rules arriving in 2027.

Such an engine for the car would be "a dream", said Griffiths. However, he added, the car would most likely instead feature a plug-in hybrid set-up.

other types of drivetrains – efficient [ICE] ones, hybrids and plug-in hybrids".

He added: "We're not going to deviate from electrification as a direction. We don't question the objective of getting to zero emissions as fast as possible. We have to be flexible on the way and we can't be dogmatic. We can't force consumers to drive electric cars."

The arrival of the Raval at the end of 2025 as a near-£20k EV – along with the VW ID 2 and Skoda Epiq siblings Cupra is also developing – will help to "democratise electromobility", according to Griffiths.

"Having smaller urban electric cars under €25,000, I think we're going to see electric cars taking off," he said. "But in the meantime, we have to offer both [EVs and non-EVs].

"We're looking to have two brands: Cupra clearly focusing on fully electric and electrified, and Seat focusing on combustion. I think we have the best of both worlds currently."

MARK TISSHAW

NEW SEGMENT-BREAKING CUPRAS WILL BE "VERY PROVOCATIVE"

Cupra will move away from straight SUVs like the Formentor (pictured)

Cupra will launch cars that "break segments" and have "very provocative bodystyles" as part of its next wave of models – and the first one could be seen later this year.

"If you want to make Cupra cool and make it iconic, then you need to start making iconic cars that perhaps don't fit in any segment," said Cupra boss Wayne Griffiths. "We are working on other cars that break the classic segments between saloons, estate cars and SUVs.

"Things will emerge and we'll see different opportunities. We are working on some very provocative bodystyles as well. Hopefully we can show you one in 2025."

These cars will differ from the Spanish brand's current line-up, such as the Formentor and the Terramar, as Cupra "deliberately [went] SUV and crossover" when it broke away from Seat eight years ago "because that's where the market is and that's what customers are looking for", said Griffiths.

He added that the other option of more conventional cars, such as saloons, "wouldn't be a priority".

AUTOCAR IMAGE

PORSCHE MULLS NEW ICE MACAN AS EVs STRUGGLE

"Conceptual decisions are being made" after 7% drop in brand's sales

Porsche may reverse its decision to make the second-generation Macan SUV exclusively electric, amid one of the most difficult periods in the brand's 93-year history.

The new Macan Electric was launched in July last year as Porsche's second EV, after the Taycan GT. While the larger Cayenne SUV was updated so that it could remain on sale in petrol form after the launch of an all-new electric version (due later this year), the petrol Macan was removed from sale in the EU in April, as it didn't comply with new cybersecurity laws. It's still offered in other markets, including the UK, but that's expected to end this year.

Now Porsche insiders have told Autocar that bosses are revisiting their decision to move the company's best-seller away from ICE power, following a 7% decline in Porsche sales globally.

The drop has been driven mostly by a downturn in sales of the Taycan, amid a wider stalling of interest in EVs. With sales falling by 50%, it was Porsche's worst-performing model in 2024.

As such, Porsche has significantly scaled back Taycan production. Reports even suggest that it could be withdrawn from the main plant in Stuttgart, putting thousands of jobs at risk.

Deputy chairman and chief financial officer Lutz Meschke has now confirmed that ICE models will remain a critical part of Porsche's line-up for longer than previously anticipated.

Initially, Porsche aimed for EVs to account for 80% of its global sales by 2030, but this target has since been reframed to "depend on customer demand".

"We are exploring the possibility of equipping some of the originally planned electric models with hybrid drives or internal combustion engines in the future," said Meschke. "Conceptual decisions are being made, but what is clear is that we are committed to the combustion engine for much longer."

While the primary focus for extending ICE production has been the Cayenne, sources within Porsche suggest that a new ICE Macan is being reconsidered as part of a "range of product scenarios".

"The reception to the new Macan [Electric] has been positive, but we are yet to see its long-term performance, given uncertain market conditions," said a senior Porsche insider.

"The downturn in Taycan sales highlights new market dynamics. We cannot rely solely on traditional assumptions about consumer behaviour."

The ICE Macan has been a hugely important product for Porsche, accounting for some 500,000 sales over its 10-year lifetime. It was also a big seller in China, a market in which Porsche's sales dropped by almost 30% in 2024.

If Porsche does decide to reintroduce a new ICE Macan, it would mirror the approach taken by fellow Volkswagen Group brand Audi and be twinned with the Premium Platform Combustion-based third-generation Q5, which was launched alongside the new Q6 E-tron late last year.

Macan Electric sits on a new, EV-specific platform

Popular petrol Macan might be renewed, in line with the Cayenne

NIO'S BUDGET BRAND BEGINS WITH DISTINCTIVE SUPERMINI

CHINESE ELECTRIC CAR maker Nio has unveiled the first model for its new Europe-bound Firefly brand, which is focused on small, affordable vehicles.

Dubbed a "small, smart, high-end electric car", the as-yet-unnamed Firefly is positioned as a rival to the BYD Dolphin and Renault 5 in the growing supermini EV segment.

It will be launched in China in April and in Europe soon afterwards. Pricing in its home market will start at the equivalent of £16,000.

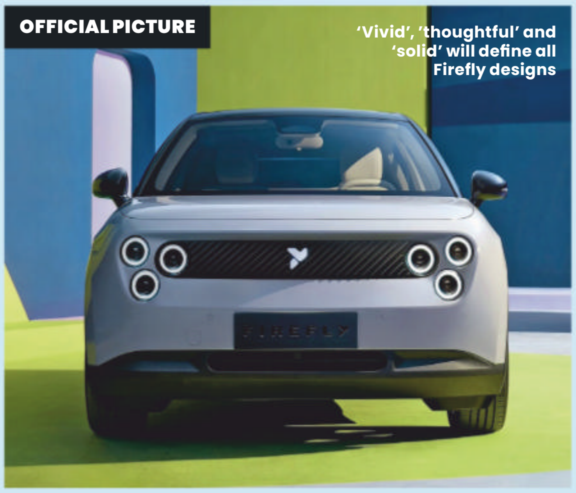
The car was designed to stand out from rivals, said Nio and Firefly design director Kris Tomasson, with a "unique" tri-circular light design at both ends.

Images show that the car offers a leatherette-clad interior focused on a large central touchscreen.

Electrically adjustable seats will be offered, Nio has confirmed, as well as blindspot cameras.

The car also has a huge split-level 92-litre frunk – one of the biggest offered by any EV in any class.

Technical details such as power, range, battery pack size and compatibility with Nio's battery-swap stations have yet to be announced.



'Vivid', 'thoughtful' and 'solid' will define all Firefly designs

Taycan sales have been hit by the global slowdown in EV demand

Despite the uncertain market conditions globally, Porsche's profit margin remains at a high level, hitting 14.1% during the first three quarters of 2024, with an operating profit of £3.35 billion from revenues of £23.7bn.

The decision to re-evaluate its future line-up aligns with market trends in China, the world's largest car market and EV market, where many car makers are introducing plug-in hybrid or range-extender alternatives alongside EVs to cater to a broader customer base.

Porsche's electrification plans continue to face significant challenges. Along with Taycan production being heavily cut, the electric 718 Boxster and Cayman sports cars, initially scheduled for 2025, face delays due to supply-chain issues with battery supplier Northvolt, which recently filed for bankruptcy.

GREG KABLE

"ICE models will remain a critical part of the line-up for longer than anticipated"

OFFICIAL PICTURE

BIGGER BATTERY FOR FACELIFTED ENYAQ

Skoda has treated the Enyaq and Enyaq Coupé electric SUVs to a makeover, giving them the new 'Tech-Deck' face introduced on the smaller Elroq EV, longer official ranges and an upgraded battery offering.

The battery in the entry-level model (now badged 60 and still available only in regular SUV guise) has increased in capacity from 55kWh to 62kWh. In combination with a more slippery body, this has extended the range from 234 to 268 miles.

The larger 82kWh pack returns for top-rung 85 and all-wheel-drive 85x models.

Pricing has yet to be confirmed, but expect a slight rise on the current £36,970 (Enyaq) and £46,440 (Enyaq Coupé) starting prices.

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

Camera and laser dot projector are hidden behind the OLED display

INVISIBLE IN-CAR TECH THAT CAN HELP SAVE YOUR LIFE

CONTINENTAL IS DISPLAYING the latest version of its biometrics in-car tech at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas this week. Called the Invisible Biometrics Sensing Display, it aims to improve passive safety for a car's occupants.

Biometrics is the science of recognition using biological characteristics and this system goes further by detecting occupants using a camera and laser projector. The technology looks through a high-resolution OLED screen and is invisible to the naked eye. It was developed by Continental in conjunction with its partner, Trinamix.

This latest version uses 3D distance mapping to ensure the airbags are deployed to the best effect in the event of a collision and it checks other restraint devices too – for example, that seatbelts are fastened correctly. The Invisible Biometric Sensing Display can also monitor vital parameters such as the driver's heart rate to identify stressful situations or even an impending medical emergency.

The imaging technology at the core of it consists of a 1.5-megapixel near-infrared camera and a laser dot projector that poses no danger to the occupants' eyes. Also developed by Trinamix, the system works by capturing reflections from points of light emitted by the projector. Occupants are unaware of it happening because the wavelengths used are all within the invisible light spectrum.

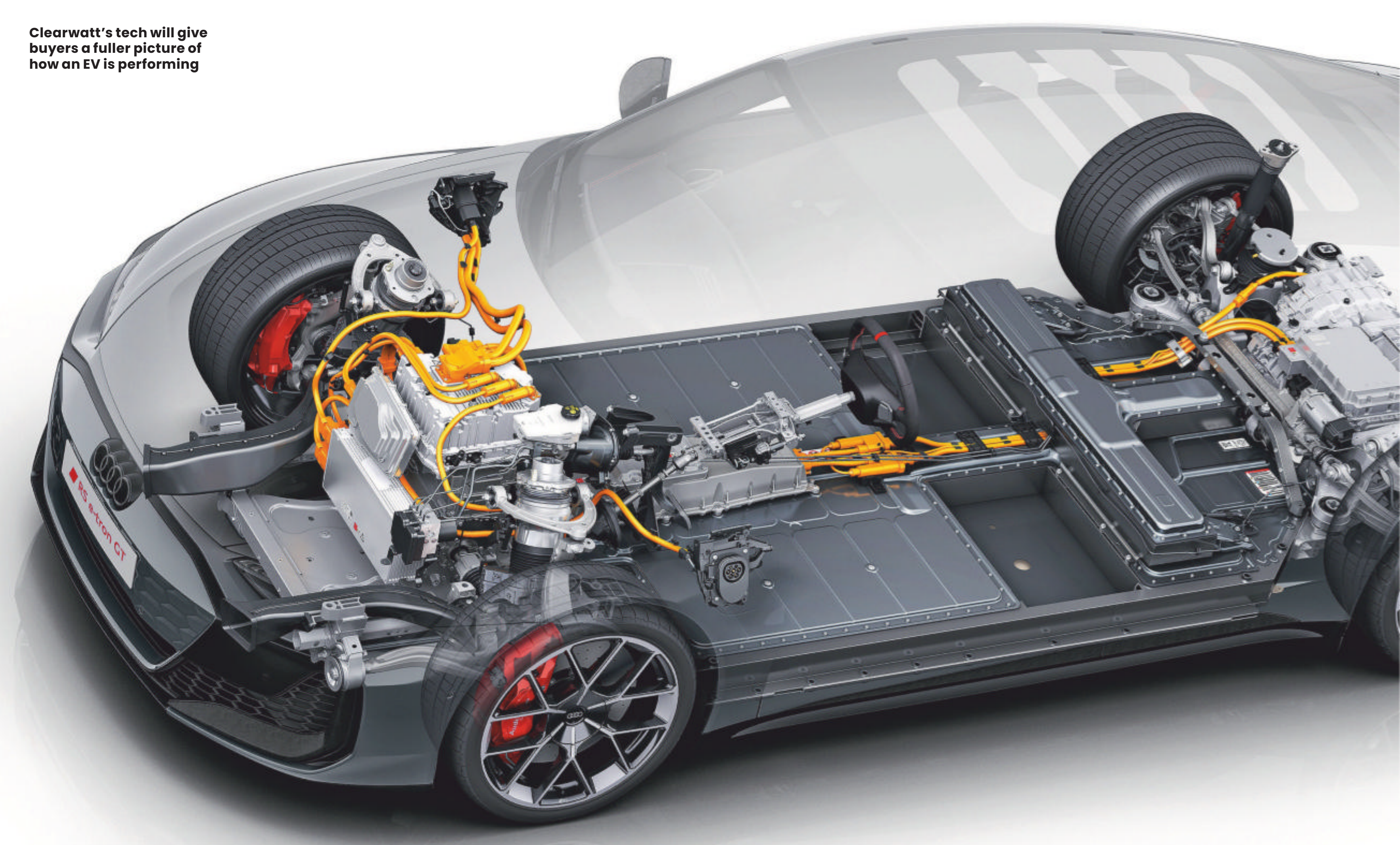
The technology also captures other information, such as the distance of the driver to the instrument panel. Unsurprisingly, the engine room behind the optical devices is powered by algorithms based on artificial intelligence.

The biometric imaging technology was developed specifically for use in car interiors, uses a single hardware module and, as such, Continental claims it is unique in the market. The developers also believe that because the system is contactless and invisible to a car's occupants, it should open up new creative opportunities for designers and be more readily accepted by users.

Other driver monitoring systems have been around for some time, of course. Bosch markets a drowsiness detection system based on an algorithm that starts recording the driver's steering behaviour from the moment they pull away. Based on the frequency and pattern of the driver inputs and other things such as the length of journey, use of indicators and the time of day, the algorithms can calculate the driver's level of fatigue and issue a warning.

Mercedes-Benz was the first to offer a drowsiness detection system, with Attention Assist in 2009. If it concludes the driver needs a wake-up call, it will issue the audible and visual prompt: "Time for a break."

System uses 3D distance mapping to detect the driver's exact position



Clearwatt's tech will give buyers a fuller picture of how an EV is performing

EV BATTERY HEALTH NOW MUCH EASIER TO CHECK

New smartphone app generates reports on range and degradation

A British company is launching a smartphone app that can calculate the state of health of an electric vehicle's drive battery.

Costing around £30 and due to be launched in the coming weeks, Clearwatt's EV Health Checker uses an EV's connected car data and information from the driver's smartphone to provide a detailed picture of its real-world efficiency and performance.

The resulting report gives a grading for the EV's battery health relative to a new vehicle and comparable vehicles; an estimate of its future battery degradation based on past performance; and a prediction of the car's range in a variety of scenarios.

It also shows the impact on the car's range of the wheels fitted to the vehicle.

Historically, EV battery data has been difficult to obtain and, even if you have been able to acquire it, the information captured and its presentation differs between manufacturers.

This has made it almost impossible to provide a standardised representation of an EV's battery health for used car buyers.

During last year's general election campaign, the Labour Party – with an eye on the used EV market – promised to introduce a battery health standard to make information clearer and more understandable, but this has yet to materialise.

"Labour's promised battery health standard has yet to materialise"

Geotab, a leading telematics company, recently reported that while the latest EV batteries are degrading at an average rate of 1.8% per year, compared with 2.3% in 2019, they continue to be sensitive to factors including ambient temperature, thermal management and charging patterns.

In particular, batteries are affected by how frequently they are rapid-charged. Geotab found that rapid-charging a battery more than three times per month can accelerate degradation by up to three times the average rate.

This risks undermining the appeal of that future staple of the used market: the three- to four-year-old, 60,000-mile, ex-company EV that has been frequently driven on motorways and subjected to regular rapid charges.

Patrick Cresswell, co-founder and managing director of Clearwatt, believes that this is a legitimate concern.

"Currently, most EV drivers don't own their car and so aren't on the hook for its condition," he said. "For example, a sales rep is likely to rapid-charge their car as often as they require and even override the automatic 80% charge limit, all without liability. This will accelerate battery degradation.

"We monitor a lot of EVs with annual degradation rates well in excess of 1.8%."

EV HEALTH TIPS

✔ Keep battery's state of charge between 20% and 80%
✔ Prioritise AC charging over DC rapid charging
✔ Rapid-charge no more than three times per month
✔ Don't leave car unused for extended periods with full or empty charge
✔ Park in the shade on hot days to avoid overheating the battery

The British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association publishes a fair wear and tear guide describing the condition that its members expect cars to be in when they are returned. A spokesperson said that because there's no agreed battery health standard, it hadn't been possible to include battery health in the guide but that this was under review.

British Car Auctions (BCA), a major source of ex-fleet cars, recently launched a grading system that it claims offers a "perfect at-a-glance"

view of an EV's battery.

The BCA Battery Health Grading system is conducted by connecting a diagnostic device to the EV's on-board diagnostics interface. The resulting report reveals the battery's remaining capacity, scoring it out of 100, and highlights any "red flags" related to defective battery modules.

However, Estelle Miller, co-founder of EV Experts, a specialist dealership in Surrey, believes that it and other test tools and report styles risk confusing buyers.

She said: "The available driving range displayed on the car's dashboard is fine, but you really need to know the battery's state of health. We use a diagnostic tool that expresses this clearly as a percentage.

"However, we recently saw a report on a used Volkswagen e-Up that had what the company that tested it called a 'high health score' when it actually had a very low battery state of health – a figure that was sneaked in at the foot of the report.

"My fear is that some test methodologies are overcomplicating things to mask higher levels of battery degradation."

JOHN EVANS

TRICK MANUAL FOR NEW PRELUDE

THE NEW HONDA Prelude hybrid sports coupé will feature a unique simulated gearbox when it's launched in 2026 as part of an effort to ensure it offers driving thrills.

The first new Prelude in more than 20 years will be based on the Civic hatchback and have a hybrid powertrain centred on a 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine.

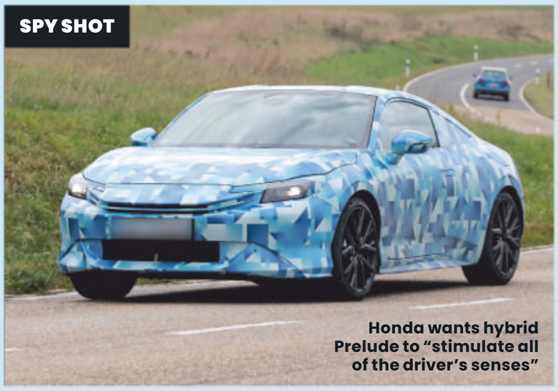
The complexity of Honda's e:HEV system effectively prohibits a manual gearbox from being fitted (despite their e-CVT branding, e:HEV models feature no mechanical transmission), so the company will instead introduce a new S+ Shift system on the Prelude.

The e:HEV powertrain primarily uses an electric motor to propel the wheels, with the engine serving as a generator.

The S+ Shift system will give the Prelude the ability to maintain "the optimal RPM for the particular driving conditions" and make full use of the engine to drive the wheels.

The driver can then use steering wheel-mounted paddles to shift virtual gears, being given a "sharp uplift feeling".

Honda has also revised its Active Sound Control system for the Prelude, claiming it will produce a noise that will "stimulate all of the driver's senses".



Honda wants hybrid Prelude to "stimulate all of the driver's senses"

SOLID PROGRESS AT MG

MG will this year launch a new EV that draws energy from a semi-solid-state battery – and it won't come at a big premium over current battery technology.

MG general manager Zhou Yu confirmed that the pack, which uses a combination of gel and solid electrolytes, will be standard equipment on the as-yet-unspecified new model.

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

MG MOTOR
LANCASTER MG

MG dealers are now busier than Vauxhall's, Peugeot's, Skoda's or Renault's

THE WHOLE MG Motor UK operation consists of just 68 people. Its head office in London includes a styling studio and a showroom but still has not just empty desks but empty floors, while the engineering team at Longbridge is just a few people tasked with setting up the Chinese company's cars for British roads – and this is all through choice.

For a brand that entered the top 10 in the UK for the first 11 months of 2024 with almost 75,000 cars sold, overtaking Vauxhall, it's a remarkably lean operation.

In 2017, only one model generation ago, MG sold fewer than 5000 cars here. It now has 100,000 sales in its sights in what has become its biggest market globally – a figure that Kia didn't achieve until 2022 and Hyundai has yet to reach.

An industry veteran in his fifth decade of service, Guy Pigounakis is enjoying life as commercial director at MG Motor UK, a place he says is refreshingly "free of politics" and straightforward in its approach, with the Chinese management leaving the experienced UK team to it.

"Most people wouldn't believe or want to believe it, but we have a huge amount of autonomy," he told me.

Pigounakis is aware that MG's Chinese ownership and manufacturing is seen as giving it an unfair advantage on costs, but he says: "When people start talking about our 'unfair' advantage, I wonder why they have 350 people in the head office of a national sales company…"

According to Pigounakis, MG's past absolutely helps it today by giving it such strong brand recognition. While marketers might think they sell cars to people straight out of university, "the fact of the matter is most people are buying new cars in their late forties, fifties or early sixties", says Pigounakis, and people of those ages are "always affectionate" in the way they talk about MG.

As for whether or not it bothers people that MG is now Chinese, Pigounakis says "we overestimate people's knowledge and interest in the industry" and states: "The average customer doesn't care."

"Nine times out of 10, you [as a buyer] are just looking for the best deal in the market at that time", he says, once you are at the end of a finance contract.

MG's sales growth in the UK has come so fast that its aftersales operations haven't caught up, and Pigounakis is in the process of enacting a plan with dealers to resolve this.

A wider industry shortage of technicians is offered as one reason, but Pigounakis knows that "as a conquest brand, we can't afford for any part of that experience that a customer has to fall short of their expectations".

"The average customer doesn't care that MG is Chinese"

He reasons: "If you've driven a Honda for 25 years and been looked after, with the cars reliable, it's a big psychological step to come out of that relationship. If we don't offer a service that's at least as good, why would they buy another MG? That's the challenge, but it has been exaggerated by us having grown so quickly."

BMW PULLS COVERS OFF RADICAL NEW INTERIOR

Panoramic projection and new touchscreen will feature in all future cars

BMW has revealed the production version of the next-generation Panoramic iDrive interface that will feature in all of its future models.

The bold new system, revealed at Las Vegas's CES tech event, will first be used in the production version of the Neue Class X electric SUV, due later this year, then subsequently be adopted by both electric and combustion models.

The Panoramic iDrive interior concept comprises four separate elements, with the most eye-catching a chunky display that is projected across a black strip stretching across the width of the windscreen.

It includes key driving information – such as speed – in front of the driver, alongside which are six customisable 'particle' slots.

There is then a centrally positioned touchscreen, which is notably angled towards the driver, running BMW's new Operating System X software.

Based on Android code, OS X has been developed in-house, with the X (rather than 10) designation subtly noting that it marks a step change from the old OS 9.

For right-hand-drive models, BMW will produce a touchscreen that slopes in the opposite direction.

It is capable of receiving over-the-air software updates and has been fully developed as a touch- and voice-control system.

It has also been designed to be more intuitive. For example, the sat-nav map is now the standard background.

It features no physical controls, with BMW reasoning that these have limited its ability to offer more complex and varied options.

The system works in conjunction with a new steering wheel featuring a number of physical buttons that offer haptic feedback.

Finally there's an optional 3D head-up display (HUD) that projects info into the driver's line of sight above the Panoramic Vision strip.

As the various elements have been developed together, BMW claims they are fully integrated. So, for instance, the HUD will show directions while the Panoramic Display gives further info on roads.

BMW said the system was developed based on real-world anonymised usage data gleaned from its existing fleet of more than 22 million vehicles and then refined in usability lab tests.

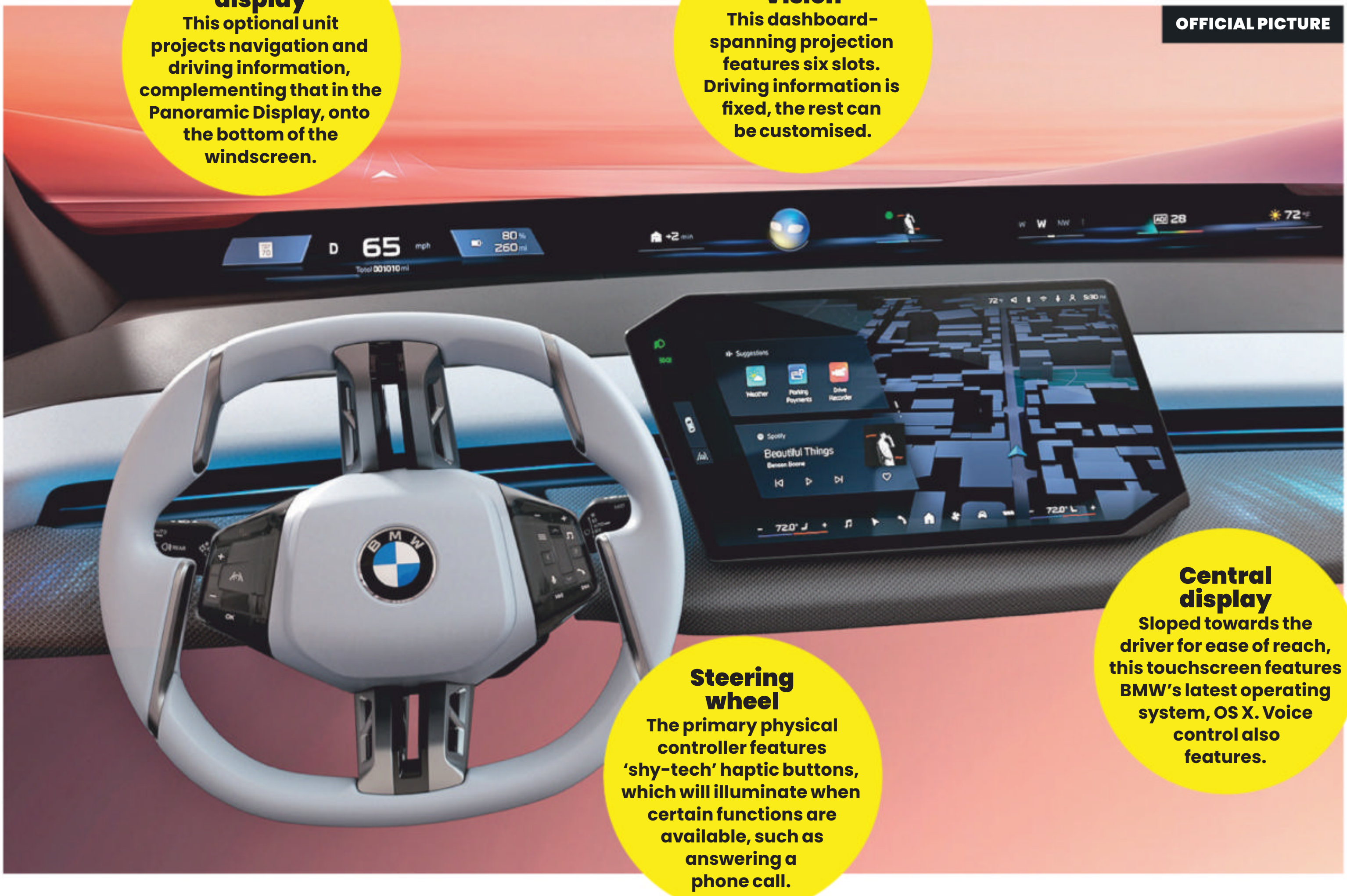
JAMES ATTWOOD

Q&A CHRISTIAN BAUER, VICE-PRESIDENT, USER INTERFACE DESIGN, BMW

Why is the screen closer to the driver than before?
"In the past, our screens have started behind the steering wheel and extended to the middle, so they have to be a little far away from you. With the Panoramic Vision, we can put the content that is really necessary up there where you have to look anyway and can move the touchscreen closer to you."

Why is it angled like that?
"We put a 16deg kink on it, which nods to BMW heritage [such as the Hofmeister kink]. But it's shaped in that direction because it means you have a perfect ergonomic position. It means you have a very short distance from the steering wheel to the display."

Did you consider a vertically oriented screen?
"We want to enhance driver interaction, and our slogan is 'eyes on the road and hands on the wheel', which means everything has to be in a perfect situation. This is the perfect situation for the technology that we have right now."



OFFICIAL PICTURE

3D head-up display
This optional unit projects navigation and driving information, complementing that in the Panoramic Display, onto the bottom of the windscreen.

Panoramic Vision
This dashboard-spanning projection features six slots. Driving information is fixed, the rest can be customised.

Steering wheel
The primary physical controller features 'shy-tech' haptic buttons, which will illuminate when certain functions are available, such as answering a phone call.

Central display
Sloped towards the driver for ease of reach, this touchscreen features BMW's latest operating system, OS X. Voice control also features.

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Renault 5 is on the cusp of gaining a conquest sale in the Cotswolds

MONDAY

I began the Happy New Year driving a left-handed Renault 5 EV prototype the company allowed me to take away from a final Car of the Year judge-off organised for the UK's six jurors late in December (see p48). The latest winner will be announced at the Brussels show just two days after this issue hits the streets, and having driven all seven finalists, my clear and obvious choice would be the 5. However, given that the 60 European jurors' opinions reflect market conditions in 23 countries (and that I'm not on the panel), a Renault victory isn't a done deal.

Still, for me the 5 answers many big questions. Can Europe make an affordable, desirable small EV? Absolutely. Does the styling work, recalling the original 5 without pastiche? Definitely. Can a modern small Renault be as comfortable as that first, rule-changing 5? It can. In total, is the new 5 a fit successor for the revered original? I believe so. All of which leads to the biggest question of all: would the Steering Committee contemplate buying one to replace her current 69-plate Mini Cooper S? We'll need to see final UK specs, colours and prices – and drive a right-hander – but at present the thumb is up.

Nothing seems to faze the Raptor – even underground car parks

> “He suggested they park their deal where the sun didn't shine”

TUESDAY

Very sorry to hear of the recent death of Osamu Suzuki, patriarch of the eponymous Japanese car firm, who trebled his company's size, made it a dominant force in the mammoth Indian market and – the bit I liked best – gave it a persona in his own tough-talking, non-conformist image. I never met him, but I once watched him launch a new Ignis at the Tokyo motor show, where he firmly restated the company's determination to plough its own furrow. Days earlier, he'd called off a component-supply deal with Volkswagen because confident German execs (who had been adopting a lot of senior-partner swagger) were laying down the law. Their expressions changed when plain-talking Osamu Suzuki suggested they park their agreement where the sun didn't shine.

THURSDAY

I'm so pleased about the news that one of my motorsport heroes, the wise and hugely experienced Formula 1 guru Pat Symonds, has joined Cadillac as its executive engineering consultant, tasked with building a grand prix team and car for the all-important 2026 season.

F1 in 2025 will doubtless be worth watching but many eyes are already fixed on 2026 and its many new rules, including the first major power unit change for a decade. In a message that unashamedly reflects his own excitement – and seeks to attract new technical talent for Cadillac's journey – Symonds reckons the team's proverbial clean sheet of paper “presents far more opportunities than it does challenges”. He also cites the impressive motorsport traditions of Cadillac owner General Motors: “From Le Mans to Talladega and sports cars to stock cars, we know how to win.” In my own dreams (and setting aside an awkward lack of any relevant skills), I'd love to work on a clean-sheet project for someone as inspirational as Symonds.

SATURDAY

In teeming rain on a day promising floods and downed trees, for an unavoidable journey from the Cotswolds to inner London we chose what you'd surely reckon was our least city-friendly set of wheels, the Ford Ranger Raptor. It turned out to be perfect: comfortable, quiet, flexible, a perfect viewing platform and entirely impervious to the weather. Best of all was discovering it wasn't too tall to fit our favoured underground car park in Cavendish Square, near Oxford Street. I've always thought this place was ruinously expensive at £60 for 12 hours – until I discovered that Transport for London relieves you of £100-plus for the same time spent in surrounding streets.

AND ANOTHER THING

Alpine UK brought an A290 to the Car of the Year event mentioned above and, as a happy A110 owner, I was eager to see how it would strike me. I don't think it will supplant our emerging family plan to own a Renault 5, but it definitely felt quicker and tougher and looked different enough. It put me in mind of the old R5 Gordinis, in which I had many good times.

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

News that the upcoming Honda Prelude will have fake gearshifts has caused some consternation among enthusiasts in the various bits of the internet where we're currently scattered. Quite a lot of sceptics, not much wild enthusiasm.

In their earlier incarnations, Preludes were among the best affordable driver's coupés on the market, with high-revving VTEC engines mated to good manual gearboxes. There are plenty of people – and I will admit that I'm one of them – who mourn the demise of cars like that.

Some say, then, that Honda should just fit the new Prelude with a proper manual 'box, like you can still get in an Integra in some markets, and to heck with the inefficiency, because the Prelude is a sports coupé.

Others say Honda should do away with even the idea of a gearshift, because it's obviously not real and we should just grow up and get over ourselves, because this transmission is trying to dupe us. As Cypher said in the 1999 film The Matrix (nothing but the latest cultural references for you here, reader): "I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, The Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious." Disliking fake technology is, I can see, an argument with merit too.

And it is, ultimately, fake tech. What this Prelude's new S+ Shift system will do is take hybrid technology but make it less efficient while still not being real.

As referenced on page 11, it has a clever way of working, developed as it is from the transmission of the latest Civic. This is sometimes referred to erroneously as a CVT (continuously variable transmission), when it's nothing of the sort. Rather unhelpfully, e-CVT is even how Honda initially referred to it. It's kind of the opposite, in that it's not a variable transmission at all.

Perhaps we should welcome fake manuals like Cypher did fake steaks

A petrol engine acts the vast majority of the time solely as a generator, making electricity for an electric traction motor that does all of the driving. In the Civic, the engine does very occasionally drive the wheels itself too, but only through one, single fixed ratio at motorway-type speeds. Most of the time it's just coupled to a system that makes electricity, with the motor doing the driving.

There is a speed at which an engine is running at peak efficiency for power generation, but there is a problem with that: an engine running at a steady RPM sounds boring.

One can live with that noise, or make it inaudible if possible, or do as Honda has done with the Civic and try to zhuzh it up a bit. The Civic's engine revs through pretend ratios to sound like an engine that's driving things. Yet if you pull a flappy paddle on the steering wheel, you change the regeneration from the motor but have no effect on the 'gears'.

> **"If this all sounds like a bit of a fudge, that's because it is"**

The Prelude will change that part, with the paddles changing those fake gear ratios instead. I don't know what it will do in terms of lift-off regeneration, but it's not difficult technically to basically mimic engine braking. The Hyundai Ioniq 5 N can do the same with no engine at all. So at high revs, you would get a lot of regen; at low revs, less.

The difference between the Ioniq 5 N and the Prelude is that while the gears are still fake, the engine is real. That's less thermally efficient than an EV and less efficient than an engine spinning at fixed-rev maximum efficiency. But it's more efficient than driving the wheels through an actual transmission with all the heat and noise losses that entails, which is why the Prelude is a hybrid in the first place, plus it's lighter than an EV and comes with other ICE-car advantages, like quick refuelling. And finally it creates, hopes Honda, some old-fashioned driver engagement.

If this all sounds like a bit of a fudge, I suppose that's because ultimately it is. But while the purist in me is sceptical, if it works well I can see myself coming around to Cypher's views on the steak and wine that his brain tells him are real: "You know what I realise? Ignorance is bliss."

GET IN TOUCH
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New Prelude isn't like those of old, sadly, but realistically it can't be

Damien Smith

Cadillac's entry will coincide with new car and engine regulations

A Cadillac Formula 1 car: sounds like an automotive oxymoron if ever there was one, doesn't it? But it's a proposal that's edging closer to solid carbonfibre reality for 2026, when General Motors plans to waft the US's best-known luxury car brand on to the grand prix grids – at the exact same moment that its traditional blue-collar, all-American rival Ford returns too. That's the power of F1 and its still-blooming, Netflix-fuelled Stateside expansion right there.

FORD AND RED BULL

Ford's comeback could be described uncharitably as a cautious case of toe-dipping. Its Blue Oval will be proudly emblazoned on Red Bull's F1 cars, but just how much influence will Ford's engineers really have on – and take from – what is developed and built by its new partner's new powertrain division in Milton Keynes? Cynics might claim it's little more than a badging exercise, although there's a parallel to F1's most successful engine: Ford paid the best £100,000 it ever spent for the DFV V8 to be created in 1967, but it was a Cosworth engine.

That Ford has chosen an alliance with the exact same team it helped to create in the first place, as Stewart… then paid for it again to turn into Jaguar… which over an inept half-decade became the prime example of how not to go F1 racing… before selling it on to a mere energy drinks company that within five years had won a world championship with the same core ingredients… well, it's better than fiction.

Now imagine a scenario in which said team, coming out of a multi-championship-winning partnership with Honda, found itself knocked off keel by a challenging new set of technical regulations, without its talismanic engineering visionary (Adrian Newey) to guide it through stormy waters and with a volatile champion driver who has a hair-trigger temper and just might be open to a better offer elsewhere (Max Verstappen). A worst-case scenario, certainly, but this is the backfiring risk that Ford is taking with its F1 return.

> **"F1 has thawed its deep-frost attitude to an all-new 11th team"**

GM GOES ALL IN

In contrast, the Cadillac project represents a committed head-on dive in at the deep end. After months of baulking at Michael Andretti's combative approach to gaining an entry, F1 has thawed its deep-frost attitude to an all-new 11th team slicing its revenues into smaller pieces by accepting an "agreement in principle" for Cadillac to take its place next year.

The Andretti family involvement now appears limited to an ambassador role for Mario, the 1978 world champion, now 84 and still as charismatic, eloquent and in love with F1 as he ever was.

An investment company called TWG Global has assumed control of the project, which is run from Cadillac's headquarters in the US with a satellite technical operation in the UK.

Good people are coming together to run the first all-new F1 team since also American-owned Haas first appeared in 2016, with a backbone of engineers familiar from the Enstone-based team now known as Alpine that won championships first as Benetton, then as Renault. The latest recruit is new team principal Graeme Lowdon, a popular figure in F1 circles who has already put in hard yards for GM's entry and has previous front-line experience with the minnow Manor/Virgin/Marussia operation that ran between 2010 and 2016. Lowdon knows precisely what Cadillac is getting into.

Red Bull will switch from Honda to Ford power after 2025 season

RED BULL CONTENT POOL

THE FERRARI LINK

Sensibly, GM is taking a stepped approach with its brave new team. For its first two or three seasons, the cars will be Ferrari-powered Cadillacs (yes, another oxymoron). A customer powertrain supply is good business for Ferrari, which is about to lose Sauber to Audi's similarly risky F1 entry – providing the new team with a sound basis on which to walk first, then run later in the decade with the promise of a Cadillac powertrain. At that point, it would become a true factory entry, in the traditional sense of the term.

There are plenty of miles yet to run before Cadillac takes a place on the 2026 grid. Stumping up an entry fee must follow, in line with F1's next-generation business agreement between its teams. It has been reported the anti-dilution of revenues fee to compensate the other 10 teams for a new one muscling in is $450 million alone.

In that context, speculation about who might drive for Cadillac is far down the list of priorities. But an experienced head such as Valtteri Bottas would make sense. A young American would be ideal too – although there are slim pickings. Colton Herta, Indycar Series runner-up in 2024 and long touted by Andretti, still doesn't qualify for an F1 Superlicence.

There's much for us still to learn about Ford and GM's plunges into F1. Both projects are fraught with clear and obvious dangers – but that both have judged it a risk worth taking indicates how compelling grand prix racing has become. Now more than ever before.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

I was interested to read that road tester Illya Verpraet's own car is a R53-generation Mini Cooper S (Our Cars, 13 November 2024) – an excellent choice. I've had my 2005 example since early 2017. It did an 18-month stint as my main car and I still have it for weekend fun.

I was given dire warnings about the reliability of these cars before I bought mine, but eight years later all it has needed on top of basic maintenance is an exhaust backbox, a wheel bearing and an oil-filled engine mount (a common point of failure, apparently).

The ride is harsh on these cars, and I'm glad I don't have to daily mine any more because of that. However, I continue to love the supercharger whine and its generally analogue nature. It's a great antidote to modern cars packed with driver assistance features that a lot of us don't want.

I wish Verpraet all the best with his R53. If he hasn't already done so, I would recommend adding a gearbox oil change to his to-do list, as this transformed the shift in my car.

Dave Robertshaw, Leeds

AURAL ASSAULT

I took delivery of a new MG 3 in May and was greeted with the same horrendous binging as Kris Culmer has experienced in his long-term test car (31 December 2024).

Neither my dealer nor MG head office had any idea how to switch it off, but my wife found an obscure reference on the internet explaining that this binging could be switched off in the sat-nav settings.

I used to get 65mpg but at present, with the heated seat and steering wheel on, this has fallen to 57mpg.

Otherwise, I think the car is generally very good and good value for money.

Tony Wright
Via email

BEWARE DERRIERE

I thoroughly endorse Matt Prior's views on reverse parking (Prior Conviction, 20 November 2024).

In Japan, there's an unwritten rule that everyone reverse parks, and so the Japanese never expect or look out for vehicles backing out of a space.

Here in France, reverse parking can be dangerous. Overall driving standards are pretty low and the French are impatient. If you're reverse parking and another vehicle is approaching, it's very likely that the driver will wait until you position your car, then slam through the gap between it and the parked vehicles behind you!

Nigel Wild
Vabre-Tizac, France

FAST STARTS

I was fascinated by the end-of-year UK market sales rankings (News, 31 December 2024).

What really stood out was how quickly the first wave of Chinese arrivals have risen up the rankings. MG has entered the top 10 ahead of Vauxhall, Peugeot, Skoda, Renault, Citroën – all mid-table stalwarts until recently. This would have been unimaginable even five years ago.

Then we have BYD already easily outselling a number of Western and Japanese brands that have been trying to grow here for years. Even more shocking is Omoda going straight in at 33rd. I imagine a lot of its 'sales' were really dealer pre-registrations, but then I've already seen a number of 5s on the road. And then it turns out that more people have been buying Ora Funky Cats than Alfa Romeos! Madness.

Perhaps this is artificial growth driven by the UK government's various EV-promoting measures, but perhaps not. Strange times…

Chris Goldstone
Via email

CHINA CRISIS

The UK needs to start putting tariffs on cheap Chinese cars. I for one do not want to support anything made by companies that are supported by China, as that helps the Chinese economy, which in turn will help the Russian war effort in Ukraine.

I also have concerns about what is happening to all the data that these Chinese companies are processing. I expect that it will all be stored on Chinese servers and no one knows what is happening to it. We must be suspicious, as a high proportion of cyber attacks and hacking comes from China and Russia.

But hey, at least these cars are affordable…

Neal Parkes
Via Facebook

MG and its Chinese compatriots are now challenging the mainstream

Are EVs really too hot for the average driver to handle?

Do you ever get the feeling that you're being watched?

QUESTIONABLE CLAIMS

Insurance broker Carl Shuker says "there are 26% more accident claims for EVs than for ICE cars" and this discrepancy exists "because EVs are much faster". ('The quickening', 27 November 2024).

I think it's a bit simplistic to equate more performance to increased insurance costs, as there are many other factors at play. For example, most EVs are heavier, have more electronic distractions, have higher purchase and repair costs and perhaps attract younger, more adventurous buyers. I don't doubt that more performance is a factor, but it's not the only one.

LP
Brighton

TIT FOR TAT

It's no surprise that the increase in ANPR cameras has coincided with an increase in numberplate cloning (News, 27 November). You increase the amount of surveillance, average speed cameras and speed guns, and people try to find a way around it.

I was penalised for doing 34mph in a 30mph zone – hardly a maniac, yet I got done for £100 and three points. So I can see why people might 'explore new options'.

Increased control will lead to increased pushback.

Tomek Tomcyk
Via Facebook

GETTY IMAGES

STRIFE BEGINS AT 40

It's interesting to see that the UK government is consulting with car makers regarding the deadline for banning the sale of new ICE cars.

Hopefully, discussions can be expanded to include an urgent review of the expensive car supplement (ECS) threshold of £40,000, which hasn't changed since its inception in April 2017.

There's a ticking time bomb of electric cars costing over £40,000 (many do) having to pay VED as well as ECS from this year.

I own a PHEV that just crept into the ECS bracket, and my VED and ECS bill for this year is £600! I will be trading it in for a pure-petrol car when the PCP is up in 12 months, as there appears to be no incentive in running a PHEV, even though it partially runs with zero emissions.

Bob Jackson
Via email

GORD KNOWS

It may have been an idea for the government to consult car makers before coming up with a motoring policy. But what the heck do I know?

I've been saying it for years: the 2030 ICE car deadline is never going to be met. I seriously doubt the Tories' revised 2035 deadline would have been either.

If Labour is serious about 2030, why not ask an expert? Gordon Brown, perhaps. Whatever you think of him as a politician, he was given a mandate to reduce CO_2 emissions and, through tax incentives, did exactly that.

Scotty
Via autocar.co.uk

CARROT SHORTAGE

The government should abolish the ZEV mandate. Let the market decide instead of imposing Soviet-style production diktats. If it wants more people to buy electric cars, it should remove VAT and VED from them (as is the case in Norway) and remove VAT on public chargers. Above all, it should make electricity cheaper. There is no reason other than subsidies, net zero mandates and other market interference for electricity costing twice as much as it should. If it were down to 10p per kWh, the public would be absolutely rushing out to buy electric cars and heat pumps en masse. They're not currently doing so because electricity is so damn expensive.

'Ricequackers'
Via autocar.co.uk

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 15 JANUARY

TWIN TEST

BMW M5 vs PORSCHE PANAMERA

Iconic super-saloon's switch to PHEV tech raises its game – but also its power and weight. Can it rise to the heights of Porsche's latest effort?

FIRST DRIVE

ALFA ROMEO JUNIOR IBRIDA

Worthy of that revered badge or just another badge-engineering job?

FEATURE

HOW TO BUY A USED EV

All you need to know to bag a good electric car and avoid a bad one

EVERY WEEK

OUR CARS

JAGUAR X-TYPE

Was Alex Wolstenholme wise to buy one on a whim? He reports on his first few weeks with it

LONG-TERM TEST

SKODA SUPERB

We gave this big estate five stars when we road tested it. Now we're going to test it every single day

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

AUTOCAR

The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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Circulation enquiries: Frontline Ltd, 1st Floor, Stuart House, St John's Street, Peterborough, PE1 5DD (01733 555161). Printed by William Gibbons, Wolverhampton. Registered as a newspaper with the Royal Mail. Member of the ABC. ISSN 1355-8293.

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Scott

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

FIRST DRIVES

TESTED 7.11.24, WILTSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

FRONTLINE MGB 2.5

New restomod in 'not a 911' and 'not electric' shock

Does Abingdon-based Frontline still need an intro? As one of the most established names on the restomod scene, perhaps not, but herewith the nutshell.

In 1991, Tim Fenna began to develop competition-reliable parts for classic MGs, having been repeatedly let down by the company's original gearboxes. By the 2000s, Frontline was the worldwide go-to for performance parts for these cars, whatever your requirement or application. In 2010, it moved to its current home, the old Benetton Formula 1 team factory, and not long after that it started making full MGB restomod rebuilds – first up the LE50, with a modified 2.0-litre Mazda MX-5 engine.

More than a decade later, Frontline is still focused on the MGB, although the interiors have become more artful and the hardware more serious and ambitious than ever. Two years ago, the company introduced the spectacular 4.8-litre V8-engined LE60, with performance to hunt down a modern BMW M4 CSL, as well as the BEE GT, an electric conversion built in response to demand from clients wanting the thrill of driving a diddy, expertly honed MGB, only in near-silence.

Here we're focusing our attention on neither of those cars but the unassuming 2.5. Don't be misled by the prosaic name. Screw any suspense: here is one of the sweetest, most neatly conceived restomods we've driven in the past year, or any year, which goes some way to taking the sting out of an asking price close to £150,000 and a waiting list that runs to two years.

The basis of the 2.5 is standard Frontline fare. You can supply your own old MGB for conversion, although Frontline prefers to use a fresh shell from British Motor Heritage, which owns the tooling from MG's old Abingdon factory.

Sales director Conner Matthews explains when we show up to collect our test car that people often have a good donor car, but even if you acid-bathe and shot-blast the best, there are areas you still can't quite get to.

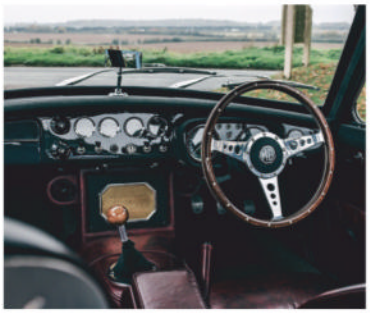
He also mentions the fact that the MGB has a unique, inbuilt

Handling has a steady but natural vivacity and honesty about it

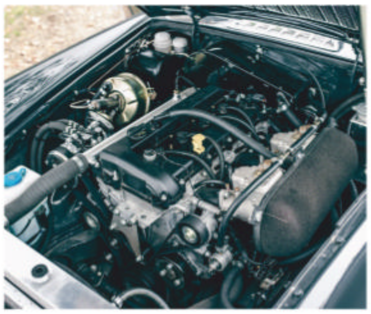
> “It grips well but leaves room for antics. Roundabouts soon become your best friends”

TESTER’S NOTE
The cabin is a feast for the senses and beautifully finished, but it also has Bluetooth for the JL speakers – all subtly integrated, of course, with the volume control under the armrest. **RL**

Tiny MG is a joy to flow along because it doesn’t try to be too hardcore



Fuel-filler tract is theatrical; underboot storage is good, too



advantage as a restomod subject, stemming from its conception. “Remember that in 1962, the car was first developed as a roadster, not a GT that they cut the roof off, so it was already a very strong chassis,” he says. “What let it down was the fact that all of the adjoining panels weren’t seam-welded. So we seam-weld them to FIA specification and that strengthens the entire body.”

As such, a Frontline MGB needs no additional bracing (beneficial for weight-saving), although the comprehensively revised rear suspension does aid stiffness.

So that Frontline’s conversions identify as true restorations, not Q-plated kit cars, the live rear axle remains. But it’s markedly adapted, now using a six-link set-up to stop the axle wandering independently of the body. There’s also a Quaife differential, strengthened half-shafts and new bearings and seals.

Up front, the 2.5 retains the original spring pans, lower arms and drop links, but the top half of the strut is bespoke. Crucially, none of the adaptations require lots of holes to be drilled in the shell, and it’s easy enough to return a car to standard. This example – a development car fondly known as Sue – is also running manually adjustable Nitron dampers and a hefty brake kit with ventilated discs.

From a technical perspective, this is an involved project, although you forget the detail the moment you hit the road, so instantly comfortable, intuitive and enveloping is the 2.5.

Beyond electric power steering (EPAS), which is adjustable via a little dial under the dashboard, there are no driver aids whatsoever, but such is the transparency of the car that even on greasy back roads you’re quickly exploring the upper reaches of the engine.

And it’s a cracking little engine – perhaps the defining element of the package and enough to make you wonder why you would ever need the added meat and inertia of the LE60’s Rover V8. It’s a crate Ford Duratec with ported heads and new pistons. Frontline also fits its own fuel injection, hotter cams, valves with stiffer springs, plus a new ECU and exhaust. It totals 289bhp and 240lb ft and spins out forever – a sensation enhanced by the long arc of the gently sprung throttle pedal.

More so than the unexpectedly good ergonomics, this is simply a well-sorted and richly rewarding classic sports car, Frontline’s efforts to make the 2.5 feel like an optimised machine from the 1960s rather than old-world aesthetic hiding modern gear paying off.

It finds an easy balance, peeling into bends steadily but accurately, with your fingertips on the filigree Moto-Lita wood rim. It grips well enough but leaves room for antics. Roundabouts become your best friends, the car’s combination of Quaife diff, light nose, outstanding visibility and razor-sharp throttle response coming to the fore. Pure joy. Yes, there is something a bit rudimentary about the handling, which isn’t perfectly cohesive at all times, but that’s the point: it’s authentic, a touch rustic. The B is of course also tiny. For those of us used to moderns, it’s so refreshing.

Ride? Good. Connected but not brittle and totally unflustered on the motorway (the Nitrons were about in the middle of their 21-click range for bump and rebound). Pedal weights are sensible; the clutch is reasonably forgiving; and the 25kg of sound-deadening that Frontline chucks in helps make the 2.5 only a little less polite than a Toyota GR86.

Naturally some will pine for a racier experience: lose the EPAS, quicken the rack, deeper buckets, a bigger contact patch to eradicate understeer, more mid-range wallop (hello, V8). And Frontline will do all that for you. Equally, it’s difficult to imagine a more versatile, honest and charming restomod than Sue.
RICHARD LANE

TECH SPEC

FRONTLINE MGB 2.5

Frontline’s V8 and EV conversions will steal the limelight, but the four-cylinder car feels like the purist’s option. A world-class restomod

Price £150,000
Engine 4 cyls in line, 2500cc, petrol
Power 289bhp
Torque 240lb ft
Gearbox 6-spd manual, RWD
Kerb weight 1120kg
0-62mph 4.5sec
Top speed 140mph
Economy 30mpg (est)
CO_2, tax band na
Rivals Alfaholics Super-R, Kamm 912c

TESTED 25.11.24, LINCOLNSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

FORD MUSTANG GT

This is more like it: regular version gets a manual gearbox for that big V8

How many sub-£100,000 cars can you name with more than four cylinders and a manual gearbox? It's slim pickings. There's the BMW Z4, BMW M2 and Lotus Emira. A last-of-the-line Porsche 718 GTS or Toyota GR Supra, maybe? Good news: there is one more option, which has, instead of a piffling six cylinders, a full eight of them, and neither a supercharger nor a turbocharger. It is, of course, the good old (new) Ford Mustang.

It might seem ironic that this manual straw to clutch comes from the country that embraced the automatic transmission before the rest of the world. But the thing is, the Americans still love a stick shift in their performance cars, and if it weren't for their appetite for manual Porsches and M cars, the Germans would long have made those auto-only.

This isn't the first time we've driven a seventh-generation Mustang in the UK: we road tested the Dark Horse version in November last year, but it failed to convince, precisely due to its clunk-o-matic 10-speeder – that and the mismatch between the Mustang's core character as a bruiser and the Dark Horse-specific track addenda. So this week we've got a standard GT with a six-speed manual. Better?

Much better, in almost every way. Let's start with the gearbox. You might expect a really burly shift quality, but it's surprisingly delicate, with a light action and relatively short throws. It can feel a bit snaggy if you rush it, but surely learning to finesse your shifts is part of the fun when you have deliberately said no to an auto? And unlike the auto, it doesn't disobey your commands.

The clutch is fairly heavy,

It's a second slower to 62mph than the CLE 53 or M2, but who cares?

TESTER'S NOTE

My test car had the standard seats, rather than the £2000 Recaros. They're not great, feeling a bit like a worn-out couch: the padding feels soft at first, but when you actually sit down, you hit the hard frame very quickly. The backrest also seems to make you hunch. **IV** but not annoyingly so, and while the throttle and brake pedal aren't ideally aligned for heel-and-toeing, it's doable. There's an automatic rev-matching mode as well. It is absurdly long-geared: second tops out north of 80mph.

Weirdly, the manual Dark Horse gets an entirely different manual: still with six speeds but made by Tremec instead of Getrag and with shorter ratios. Having tried it in the previous-generation Mach 1, I can tell you that its gearshift quality is a lot meatier.

The long ratios are doubly odd because Ford's Coyote 5.0-litre V8 isn't some old-school chugger. It revs to 7400rpm and wants to be kept on the boil. Accelerating from 50-70mph requires a downshift from sixth.

The good news is that it sounds spectacular at any revs, so you don't feel like you're missing out if you don't take it to the redline all the time. It's perfectly burbly at lower revs and hardens to a hammering roar at higher revs. And with the manual, you just feel even more connected to that amazing engine.

So, it's worth sticking with the manual, then, and it's hard to see why you would bother with the Dark Horse either. It gets only a handful of extra power and no extra torque, and this GT drives every bit as well.

If anything, its damping feels a touch less rigid. The magnetorheological adaptive dampers (a £1750 option on the GT, standard on the Dark Horse) are still very firm, even in the Comfort setting, although the ride feels rubbery rather than brittle.

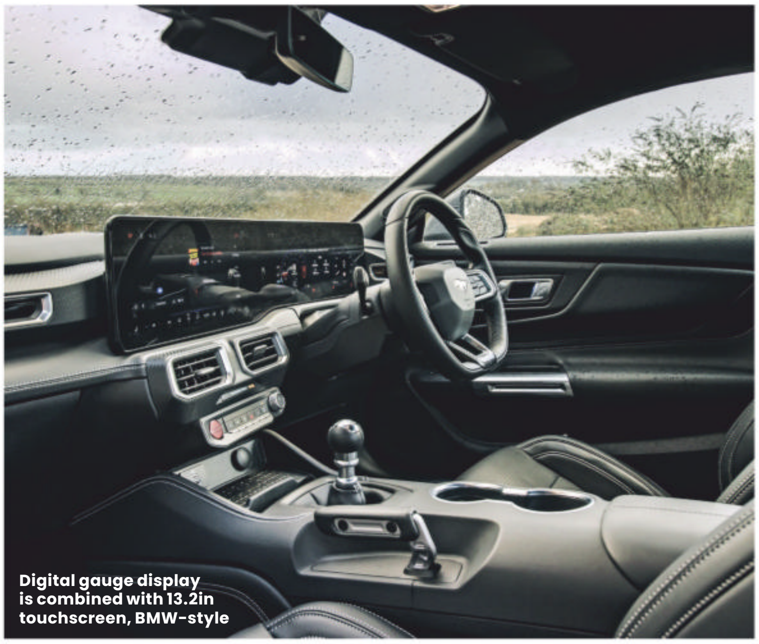
It settles down on the motorway, making the Mustang a pretty decent long-distance cruiser (if you can stomach the 20mpg).

You wonder which roads they were calibrated for, though, since the firmer settings are completely pointless on the road. Even so, over crests and big bumps, body control can feel a tad loose.

I can forgive it the slight uncouthness, because the Mustang is ultimately a muscle car, and one that's very willing to entertain. The spectacular sound, the manual gearbox and the classic rear-drive balance make this one of the most entertaining cars I drove in 2024.

> **"It doesn't get bogged down in minutiae. Instead, it's just fun"**

The traction control is good, but it only takes one button to deactivate it



Digital gauge display is combined with 13.2in touchscreen, BMW-style

Conditions were cold and greasy for my week with the Mustang, which may sound scary with 440bhp and rear-wheel drive, but this car just has balance to spare. Little slides, big slides: it's all just a flex of the right foot away and very easy to catch.

Inside, the GT is no different from the Dark Horse, apart from a few coloured accents. That means the driving position is nice and low and the cabin is well appointed, if a bit short on buttons. The old Mustang's interior had much more design flair compared with this screen-heavy set-up. It works okay, though.

You can easily find fault with the Mustang. It's not the most sophisticated sports car you can buy, but it knows its role in life. It's a proper muscle car, one that doesn't get too bogged down in the minutiae of steering feel and secondary ride. Instead, it gives you a mega engine, a manual gearbox, matchbox-car styling and handling that's just fun. We need cars that are less serious and more fun.

At £55,725, it costs about the same as a four-cylinder Porsche 718 Cayman or a BMW M240i with a few options. Given how unique an offering the Mustang is these days, that's a bit of a bargain.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

FORD MUSTANG GT

Not particularly clever but big and fun, giving you an experience that's hard to find elsewhere for relatively reasonable money

★★★★☆

Price £55,725
Engine V8, 5038cc, petrol
Power 440bhp at 7250rpm
Torque 398lb ft at 5100rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, RWD
Kerb weight 1733kg
0-62mph 5.3sec
Top speed 155mph
Economy 23.5mpg
CO_2, tax band 274g/km, 37%
Rivals BMW M2 manual, Mercedes-AMG CLE 53 Coupé

UK VERDICTS

TESTER'S NOTE
Petrol and diesel E-Class estates have the greatest load-lugging ability; their plug-in hybrid counterparts suffer a 155-litre reduction in boot capacity. **JD**

TESTED 2.12.24, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

MERCEDES-BENZ E450D

New E-Class flagship brings air suspension and diesel straight six to UK

We've all spent time pondering what the ultimate car for all occasions would be. It's a staple of idle bar room chit-chat or contemplative daydream moments when we should be doing something more productive. You know the kind of car I'm talking about: it can cope with the daily slog, can take family-ferrying duties in its stride, has enough comfort and stamina to cross continents in a single bound and yet can humble the odd sports car in a point-to-point head to head. All of this and it can carry everything you own, including a Magnet showroom's supply of kitchen sinks. Well, on paper, the latest Mercedes-Benz E450d Estate might just fit the bill.

For starters, there's plenty of performance: its lusty 3.0-litre diesel straight six (now with a 23bhp 48V integrated starter-generator and an electrically spooled turbo compressor for instant response) combines silky-smooth delivery with a sledgehammer punch (0-62mph takes just 5.0sec). It pulls hard from low down yet revs with real enthusiasm and just the hint of sporting snarl.

Better still, this diesel flagship now gets Mercedes' Airmatic air suspension as standard, which delivers almost S-Class levels of suppleness. Like many of these set-ups, there's some knobbliness at low speeds, but up the pace and this E-Class simply smothers bumps and imperfections, which in combination with its hushed refinement makes any journey a guaranteed stress-free zone.

At the touch of a button the suspension can be tautened, helping to reduce roll and control the car's not-inconsiderable weight when slicing through corners.

Make no mistake, though: this is still a big car and it's clear that Mercedes' intentions are to isolate you as best they can from the worst of the outside world, rather than get your synapses sparkling.

Despite its lack of feedback, the steering is nicely paced and accurate, allowing you to place the car with precision.

There's plenty of grip and the four-wheel drive system even plays ball with a smidgen of rear bias to help deliver some throttle-on neutrality when you're exiting corners. The BMW 5 Series Touring is still a more engaging option, but there's not much in it. In real-world conditions, you will rarely cover ground faster.

However you choose to drive the E540d, its interior impresses, combining all the space you could need with a typically upper-class vibe. It lacks the ultimate vault-like quality that we still want and expect from a Mercedes (there are some creaks and squeaks when you prod parts of the cabin trim), but the design is slick and the materials used are top-notch.

Meanwhile, the boot offers a vast 615 litres of capacity, while dropping the rear seats (easily done at the touch of a button) liberates a cavernous 1830 litres.

So what's the catch? Well, it has been a while since diesel was the default choice for decreasing assaults on your wallet. A claimed 44.8mpg means a decent return at the pumps (and, in combination with a 66-litre tank, a theoretical range of 650 miles), but company car drivers used to the tax savings of an EV will feel a little light-headed at the E450d's 37% BIK banding. And then there's a price tag that's knocking on the door of £90,000.

Ultimately, this car is out of step with the times: it's not an SUV and it's not powered by electricity. That's why it no longer has any direct rivals. Yet that doesn't stop it being an extremely compelling, if expensive, way of getting around on all roads and in all weathers. A classy choice in a class of one.
JAMES DISDALE

14.4in touchscreen is standard; 12.3in passenger display is a £1495 option

TECH SPEC

MERCEDES-BENZ E450D 4MATIC ESTATE EXCLUSIVE PREMIUM PLUS

Not cheap to buy or run, but Swiss Army knife adaptability means you're unlikely to need a second car
★★★★⯪
Price £88,945
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2989cc, turbocharged, diesel, plus 48V ISG
Power 367bhp at 4000rpm
Torque 553lb ft at 1350-2800rpm
Gearbox 9-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2140kg
0-62mph 5.0sec
Top speed 155mph
Economy 42.8-44.8mpg
CO_2, tax band 171g/km, 37%
Rivals BMW 550e Touring, Audi S6 Avant

TESTED 16.12.24, MIDDLESEX **DELIVERIES** NOW

HYUNDAI BAYON

Facelift for lower-price Puma rival

THE NEWLY UPDATED Hyundai Bayon is a reminder that there are still simple and relatively affordable options out there amid all the SUVs and EVs that are setting the automotive agenda.

Hyundai's decision to give the baby crossover a nip and tuck made sense when key rivals like the Ford Puma and Renault Captur were given a refresh earlier last year.

Up front, there's a new grille, revised headlights and a distinctive light bar across the front edge of the bonnet, although it still looks pretty anonymous to these eyes.

The Bayon rides on the same Hyundai- and Kia-developed K2 supermini platform as before and can be had only with a 1.0-litre turbo petrol triple. However, you can no longer choose the 118bhp version and, as in the conventionally shaped i20, the 48V mild-hybrid system has been ditched – although you can still choose between a six-speed manual or a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox for your 99bhp engine.

SE Connect trim has also been dropped, which means Advance is now the entry point to the range, at £22,480. Still, that means the Bayon undercuts most rivals across the board; even the well-equipped range-topping automatic Ultimate model is only marginally dearer than the entry-level Ford Puma.

Inside, it remains light and airy, despite a smorgasbord of hard grey plastics and only a handful of soft-touch elements. It's fairly spacious too, although the sloping roofline does limit head room in the back.

Speed limit warning and driver monitoring systems now feature, and like in other Hyundai models, they are a bit overactive, plus you have to dive into the touchscreen menus to turn them off, which is a challenge when driving.

The engine has a slightly dull throttle response and turbo lag makes it feel rather staid unless you use plenty of revs. Thankfully, the manual gearbox is snappy and more communicative than most.

Hyundai quotes official economy of 51.4mpg, and you won't struggle to achieve a similar figure in reality.

The Bayon rides firmly, and while it maintains good body control, the light steering lacks any real feedback to keep you fully engaged. You get jostled around at low speeds and it struggles to iron out lumps and bumps.

In short, then, it can match neither the agility of the Puma nor the supple ride of the Volkswagen T-Cross.

SAM PHILLIPS

TECH SPEC

HYUNDAI BAYON 1.0T ULTIMATE

By no means a front-runner in its class but remains a practical and affordable option for fans of jacked-up hatchbacks

★★★½☆

Price £25,280
Engine 3 cyls in line, 998cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 99bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 127lb ft at 1500-3500rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, FWD
Kerb weight 1095kg
0-62mph 11.6sec
Top speed 111mph
Economy 51.4mpg
CO_2, tax band 126g/km, 30%
Rivals Ford Puma, Renault Captur, VW T-Cross

The infotainment is impressive, as is the haul of standard kit

TESTED 14.12.24, MIDDLESEX **DELIVERIES** NOW

PEUGEOT E-TRAVELLER

Eight-seat van gets another 25kWh

Its commercial vehicle origins are obvious inside

THE PEUGEOT E-TRAVELLER has – along with its Citroën, Fiat, Toyota and Vauxhall siblings – been given refreshed styling, updated interior technology and, far more significantly, a much bigger battery.

Peugeot's biggest passenger van is powered by the same 134bhp front-mounted electric motor as the e-2008 crossover and draws its energy from a 75kWh battery for a 217-mile range – a vast improvement on the 143 miles of its 50kWh predecessor.

The e-Traveller's 100kW peak DC charging rate is a drawback, however, if you will be relying on the public network at all: a 10-80% charge takes a minimum of 45 minutes, whereas the Volkswagen ID Buzz can accept 185kW for a sub-30-minute top-up time.

The Long version (5331mm, compared with 4981mm for the Standard) feels cavernous inside: even with all eight seats in use, there's a 989-litre boot, and head room is good throughout, although leg room is a bit limited for adults in the third row.

Hard, durable plastics are abundant, but in a big, van-shaped people carrier this can be forgiven.

The new 10in infotainment touchscreen is easy to use on the move, although it suffers some latency issues.

Of course, it feels more intimidating to thread through town than, say, a Kia EV9, but its lofty seating position does give you a good view out.

You need only look at the 14.3sec 0-62mph time to realise that 134bhp isn't really enough to haul the e-Traveller's 2240kg kerb weight; even in Sport mode it feels sluggish.

It rides okay around town, but on rural back roads it feels quite bouncy and unsettled, with the odd thunk over potholes.

The e-Traveller's boxy shape also means energy is sapped away pretty quickly at higher speeds, and so its official 217 miles of range is more like 180 in the real world, limiting its usability for both big families or airport shuttle fleets – its two main target markets.

The ID Buzz LWB may be some £10,000 more expensive than the e-Traveller, but it has a longer range and a general car-ness, both dynamically and inside, that makes it far easier to recommend.

SAM PHILLIPS

TECH SPEC

PEUGEOT E-TRAVELLER 75KWH ACTIVE LONG

Cavernous electric people carrier is let down by short range, poor performance and high price

★★★☆☆

Price £49,895
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 134bhp
Torque 192lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 2240kg
0-62mph 14.3sec
Top speed 81mph
Battery 75kWh (total)
Range, economy 217 miles, 2.4mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Ford E-Tourneo Custom, Maxus Mifa 7, Volkswagen ID Buzz LWB

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5716

MINI ACEMAN

Electric supermini gets a higher-riding, five-door running mate

MODEL TESTED

MINI ACEMAN SE EXCLUSIVE

Price £38,500
Power 215bhp
Torque 243lb ft
0-60mph 6.8sec
30-70mph 5.7sec
Top speed 105mph (claimed)
Average economy 3.3mpkWh
Average charging rate 70kW
CO_2 emissions 0g/km
70-0mph 47.2m (-1 deg C, slippery)

The Mini brand had a busy 2024, but the car to which we now turn – the Aceman – may well be its most important development among so many renewed siblings. That's because the Aceman isn't quite a natural successor for the short-lived Paceman three-door crossover of 2012, nor is it a differently named follow-up to the slow-selling Clubman pseudo-estate.

It is, instead, a new kind of Mini intended to perfectly plug the gap that has started to appear between the core Cooper hatchbacks and the C-segment-sized Countryman. And if it seems to assume something of a key significance, that may be because it was the scion Aceman concept, back in 2022, that gave us our first flavour of its maker's current design language.

This is the car that aims, more than any other, to perfectly fuse trademark Mini dynamism and desirability with more pragmatic usability. Built exclusively by Spotlight Automotive (the BMW Group's joint venture with Great Wall Motor) in Zhangjiagang, China, it is also the only model in Mini's showroom catalogue to be exclusively wedded to electric power.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Familiar-but-different Mini styling; choice of motor outputs
CONS Cooper derivation limits outright size, battery capacity and range

The Aceman is a four-metre-long, supermini-sized, jacked-up crossover, then, intended to rival anything from a Volvo EX30 to the recently announced Ford Puma Gen-E.

It is, in a rather simplistic sense, a stretched Cooper electric hatchback made on the same Chinese production line as the three-door-only supermini. Compare the dimensions of both cars and you will find that the Aceman is 80mm longer in the wheelbase than the Cooper, 221mm longer overall and just 54mm taller, making it small and fairly low-rise by B-SUV class standards. Standing next to one, you might simply take it for an only averagely large 'regular' supermini that just happens to be wearing its hiking gear.

Given the established technical relationship between the Cooper and Aceman, much of the rest of the mechanical content follows suit. It's driven by one of the BMW Group's favoured separately excited synchronous motors and, just as with the electric Cooper, that motor can supply 181bhp (Aceman E), 215bhp (Aceman SE) or 255bhp (Aceman JCW) to the front wheels, depending on how much zip you want your mid-sized Mini to command.

Concept car previewed Mini's new era

Drive battery packs are shared with the electric Cooper too. And so, while the kind of money that Mini is asking for some Aceman models will get you close to 80kWh of usable battery capacity or more from other compact EVs, in this one you get less than 50kWh (SE, JCW), or only 36.6kWh in bottom-rung E form.

Our SE test car came with a WLTP range of 244 miles, in a class where 350 miles and more is available. 'Short-range and nippy' may be a look that an electric Cooper hatchback wears comfortably enough, but on a new derivative that's supposed to bring extra dimensions of usability, it doesn't sit quite so well.

Like the smaller Cooper, the Aceman uses all-independent suspension, coil springs and conventional passive dampers. Mini has chosen 'preloaded' anti-roll bars for tight rein on body roll and the usual direct steering rack, which we recorded at just 2.3 turns between locks.

Should all of that make it ready to entertain better than rivals? Well, our Aceman SE was 1756kg on the scales, compared with the 1587kg Fiat 600e, 1739kg Kia Niro EV and 1779kg single-motor Volvo EX30. So staying small doesn't actually seem to have made it especially light.

INTERIOR

★★★⯪☆

PROS Innovative premium ambience and use of materials
CONS It's on the small side

So just how much bigger than a regular hatchback does this Cooper-derived modern 'Maxi' feel on the inside? In some ways, not much. Entry is via a driver's door aperture that bigger adults are likely to consider snug. With the seat slid back far enough to make room for longer legs, you will find the B-pillar suddenly in your way as you squeeze in and out, and the roofline close enough to clout your head on if you're careless.

The hip point and driving position do feel that bit higher than the tea tray-like Cooper's, of course, though still far from high in general terms. And the fascia is a familiar one. The textile dashboard covering and airy feel are quite lounge-like, and the 'designer' neatness of the layout is delivered alongside an apparent charm that's alternative and appealing.

■ Chunky, squared-off wheel-arch cladding is part of an exterior design that mixes diminutive charm with a hint of SUV toughness well, and also disguises the Aceman's vertical bulk.

■ Go for Rebel Red paintwork and you can have a matching roof, or a contrast roof in either black (as fitted) or white. A Blue Multitone roof, which fades from dark towards the rear to light at the front, costs £650.

Few would mistake this for anything other than a premium interior; it's just not a significantly different one from a Cooper SE's. The Aceman gets chunky free-standing interior door handles of its own, and a decorative leather strap in a different place from the one on a Cooper.

Meanwhile, the way the central, 240mm, side-plate-sized OLED multimedia display doubles as an instrument screen and heating console won't meet everyone's approval (see 'Multimedia', p28). Below it, Mini provides a rather tiddly transmission lever; a mostly superfluous faux engine start key (which you might wish wasn't there the first time you forget to turn it without having configured the car's ADAS features, before then having to go back to square one); and some useful physical audio controls and menu shortcuts.

When it comes to practical touches, the centre storage console that runs all the way through to be accessible by rear passengers is a neat idea, and the moulded plastic accessory docks on the front seatbacks, though ugly, are likely to be appreciated by those in the back.

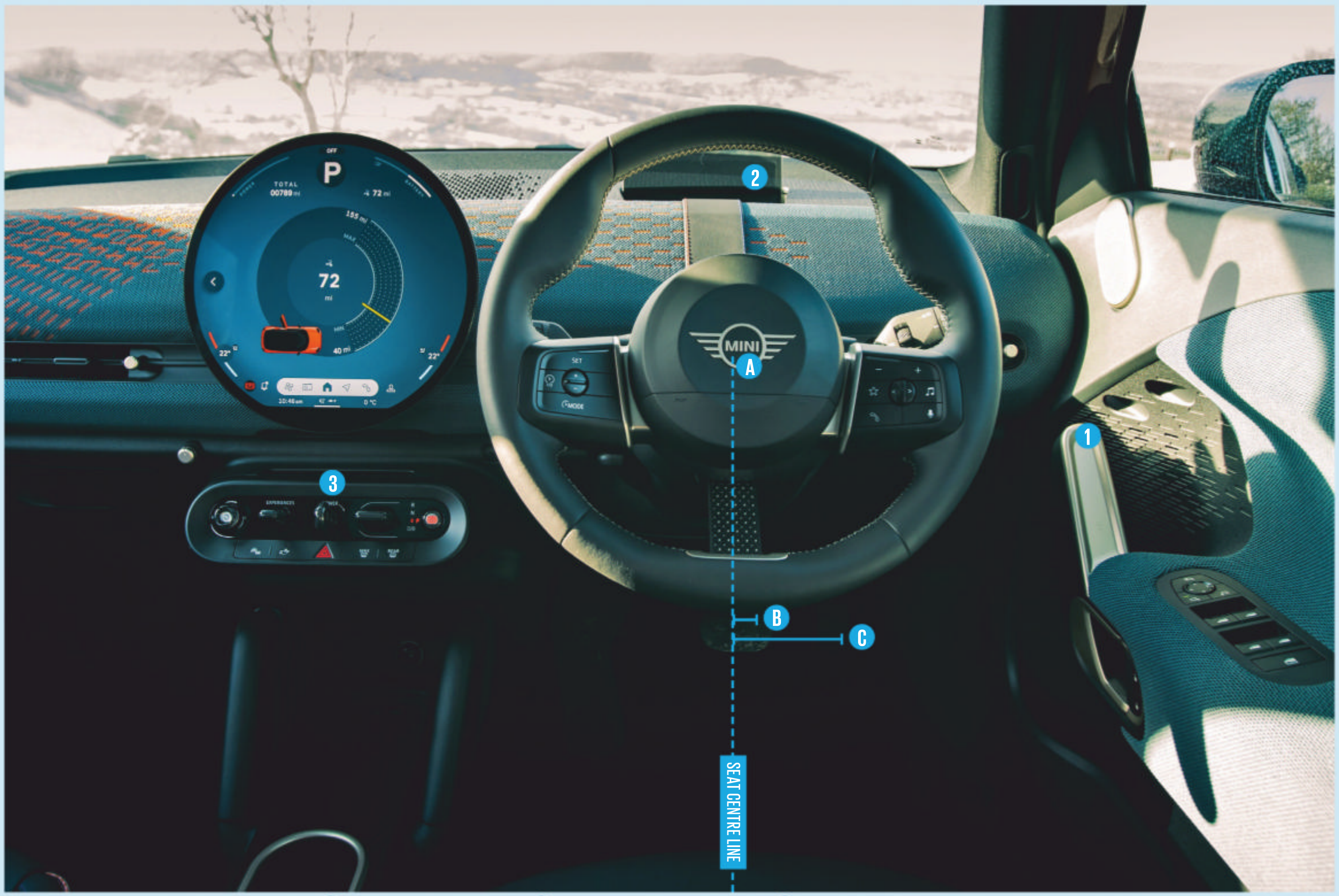
But the Aceman's outright five-seat passenger space probably won't be. According to our tape measure, the car offers head room that's just about class-competitive, but it lags behind a Smart #1, Cupra Born and Kia EV3 for rear leg room. It's not as tight in the back as some ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Door-card design is one of the interior's bigger points of difference relative to other Minis. Free-standing interior grab handle is at least easy to grab. Faired-in door release isn't.

② The head-up display, which is in actual fact a separate pop-up screen, mitigates the operating concept's reliance on the central display for driving information. It's standard on SE grade.

③ Small switchgear console offers useful physical audio controls and menu shortcuts. Of rather less use are the 'experience control' drive mode toggle and engine start 'key'.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 55mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 180mm right. Pedals are well spaced, the steering column likewise, and amply adjustable.

◄ B-SUVs (Volvo EX30, Jeep Avenger, Fiat 600e), and is probably practical enough – just – to feel like a step up from a Mini Cooper five-door. But you still wouldn't really want to be the adult who regularly had to travel in the back of one.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★☆☆

PROS Screen looks neat; some usability-boosting shortcuts
CONS No physical cursor controller; centralised instruments are away from the driver's line of vision

The Aceman's 240mm circular multimedia system, the same as in both a Cooper and Countryman, sets it apart from other BMW Group relations. You navigate it similarly to how you might an equivalent in a BMW 1 Series or X1, though: without the help of a physical cursor controller, but aided by some useful shortcut keys and quick-access menus (the car's 'toolbelt' user-customisable shortcut menu can be set to pop up when you press the star button on the steering wheel).

It's important to set up a Mini Connected online user account before you do anything else, and then download it to the car (a two-minute process). Otherwise, you will have to reset everything – from the head-up display position, to your preferences for navigation mapping and ADAS settings – every time you start a journey, and the car's voice recognition also won't work. But once you have, the pre-flight rigmarole and general irksomeness of the tech is much reduced.

Without any cursor controller, the system is a bit more distracting to operate while driving than it might be, but it is by no means terrible on that score once you're familiar with it. Mini's insistence on making the central screen carry instrumentation as well as so much else does frequently draw your eyes further away from the road than necessary. The head-up display, which addresses that problem fairly well, should be standard on all models (it comes with the Level 1 option package on an Aceman E).

PERFORMANCE

★★★⯪☆

PROS Enough zip to feel fun; robust in intensive use and at low charge
CONS Not among the quicker cars in the class; lacks manual regen toggles

The Aceman's 'Mini Sound' propulsion noise is another good reason to sign up for a Mini Connected user account. It otherwise defaults to on – and you will probably either love it or hate it. It's not uninteresting to listen to – quietening down and amping up with throttle load, at least, so that it's not a permanent presence.

The car has fairly strong outright performance by the broadest standards of the class, but whether it's quite enough to make the Aceman SE stand out among EVs, even at this price point, is questionable. On a very chilly day and in slippery test conditions, it just about dropped below the 7.0sec-to-60mph mark but finished on the wrong side of that rubicon to 62mph. The class average for a sub-£40k electric compact SUV is probably nearer eight seconds, but we have tested some that needed less than six to reach 60mph. The Aceman certainly can't claim to be the zippiest car of its kind, then, even if there is a JCW model for those who want more punch. The car took almost full power from rest, so we would estimate that the conditions cost it no more than a tenth or two.

Being an EV, drivability is entirely simple, although regen control is buried in a touchscreen menu. Adaptive mode (which can feel strange as it suddenly adjusts regen with the changing traffic situation in front of you) is the only way to get the car to coast freely when the road is open, and conserve momentum, and it's just not accessible enough to activate opportunistically. That's why an increasing number of EV makers use paddles for quick manual control, and BMW and Mini really need to get on board.

Traction is okay in the dry; less so in slippery conditions, in which the car leans a lot on the ESC (which itself feels quite subtle and well developed). The Aceman's dynamic vibe is certainly not an assured, easy-going one, but then that sense of boisterous, barely controlled enthusiasm is all part of the shtick.

Strong brakes, activated through fairly consistent pedal feel, complete the picture here – and they resist fade quite well. During our track testing, the Aceman's electric powertrain also resisted fade during five fast laps, which was a problem that the old Mini Electric had. It showed a little performance drop-off below 10% state of charge, tapering as the reserves fell further, but not by a punitive amount and only after warning the driver.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Has some Mini-typical agility and entertainment value
CONS Has a Mini-typical busy, firm, excitable ride

The Aceman feels very much more like a proper modern Mini to drive than a typical compact SUV, and in that respect the car's creators can consider it a dynamic success.

Where the Countryman left us a little unconvinced by its slightly incoherent pairing of enlarged size and feigned-feeling agility, the Aceman's on-road character comes together better. It's firm, busy and interactive; a two-hands-on-the-wheel, both-eyes-on-the-road type of drive. So it's quite fun to take to task, but also feisty and lively enough to give you plenty to do in the act of driving it with some gusto – and quite likeable for it.

The car pulls it all off by feeling moderately compact, and at least fairly agile and light on its feet. It has quick, heavyish steering, with plenty of feel and feedback, which does come with some inevitable torque steer and the occasional snatch of tramlining, though nothing troubling provided you're expecting it. You can also feel the torque vectoring feeding back through the driven front wheels when tackling tighter bends, which, because it's fairly subtly done and typically works to your advantage, isn't so intrusive. Somehow, Mini manages to make even this feel like part of the car's puppyish entertainment act.

The comfort levels some might expect of a daily-usable five-door hatchback are, of course, only present in qualified terms. The ride is a little restless and excitable on country roads especially, but it does settle down at least fairly well on smooth motorways, and it isn't especially noisy.

We have previously tried a less powerful Aceman E, a car you might expect to be less highly strung but in which the ride was actually more fidgety. The extra weight of Mini's bigger battery might actually help tie this car down a bit better.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★★★☆

PROS Unintrusive systems tuning; they're easy to deactivate, mostly; remote parking is an option
CONS Would be annoying if you didn't want a Mini Connected user account

This car may be small, but it's not short of digital convenience features. Though our test subject didn't have it, the Level 3 options package brings with it a Parking Assist Plus system that will allow you to exit the car and move it into or out of a tight parking bay via your smartphone – not the kind of feature commonly seen on cars at this size and price.

There's plenty of configurability with the various ADAS features, which, with the exception of the mandatory-on speeding alarm and lane keeping systems, stay as you left them. The former is easy to switch off via a long press of the cruise control 'set' button, and control for the latter is 'savable' in your toolbelt shortcuts.

There's driver monitoring too, but unlike in Volvo's EX30, it doesn't seem overly sensitive and won't castigate you for looking momentarily over towards the centrally located instruments. If you happen to leave the lane keeping on, meanwhile, it doesn't intrude until you get up to quicker out-of-town speeds.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★☆☆

PROS Competitive entry prices; DC rapid charging hits and maintains advertised rates
CONS Limited electric range given the price; you could spend plenty of money

Cooper E and SE buyers have to find less than £2000 to open up ownership of the bigger five-door Aceman, which doesn't sound like much. It starts at £31,800 for the E, £36,300 for the SE and £40,800 for the JCW, but Exclusive and Sport trim levels bump the price up, so the average owner should expect to spend between £3000 and £4000 on top of the basic Aceman entry price.

Range and DC rapid-charging speed are likely to be disappointments to Aceman buyers, who have parted with so much cash. It doesn't really extend the repertoire of Mini's smaller hatchback for longer-distance use.

Mini claims 192 miles for the cheaper Aceman E, and 244 miles for our mid-level SE, but we didn't reproduce that. The SE averaged 162 miles in mixed testing, slightly less at constant motorway speeds and only just beyond 200 miles in our low-speed, urban-and-commuting 'everyday' efficiency test. Even the decidedly short-legged Volvo EX30 and Fiat 600e did better (although neither was tested in quite such chilly ambient conditions).

Rapid-charging speed is pegged at 75kW for the cheaper Aceman E and 95kW for the SE and JCW – which looks poor next to what else your money might buy. Our SE test car did respectably well in our rapid-charging tests, with a weighted average speed of 70kW, but, again, rivals do better. ▶

FRONT Leg room 1130mm, head room 970mm. Raised Mini hip point makes it normal by wider standards. Centre console storage is quite generous.

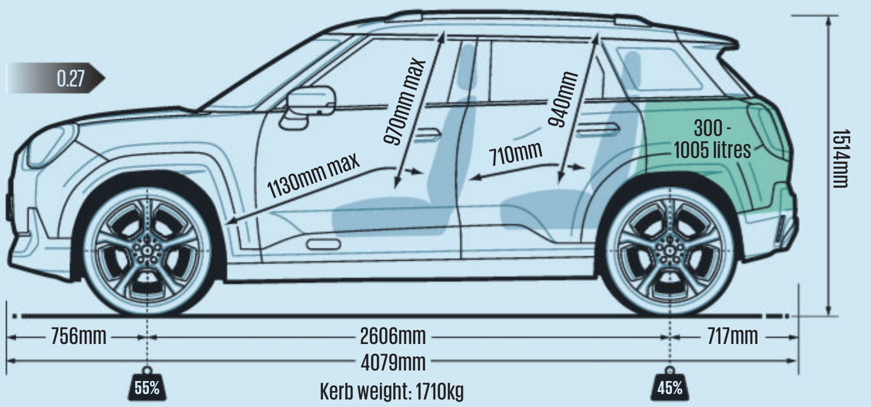
REAR Leg room 710mm, head room 940mm. It is neither the roomiest nor the tightest back row in the class, but three across would be a squeeze too far.

BOOT Length 580-1380mm, width 940mm, height 390-460-710mm. Its 300-litre space is very ordinary for the class but there is underfloor storage.

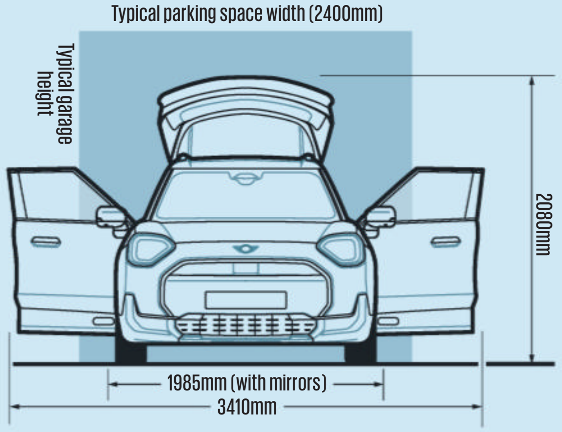
"The car's creators can consider it a dynamic success"

TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS


0.27
970mm max
940mm
300 -
1005 litres
1130mm max
710mm
1514mm
756mm
2606mm
717mm
4079mm
55%
45%
Kerb weight: 1710kg

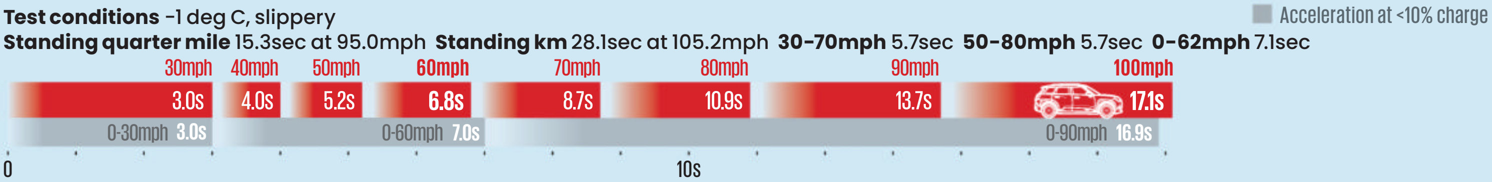
PARKING


Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2080mm
1985mm (with mirrors)
3410mm

ACCELERATION

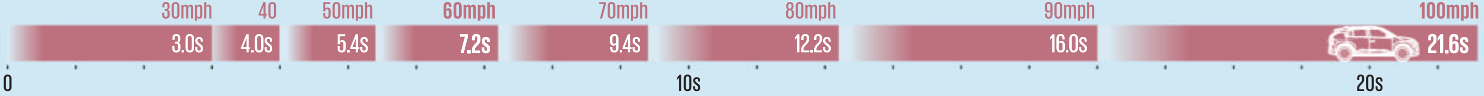
Test conditions -1 deg C, slippery

Standing quarter mile 15.3sec at 95.0mph **Standing km** 28.1sec at 105.2mph **30-70mph** 5.7sec **50-80mph** 5.7sec **0-62mph** 7.1sec



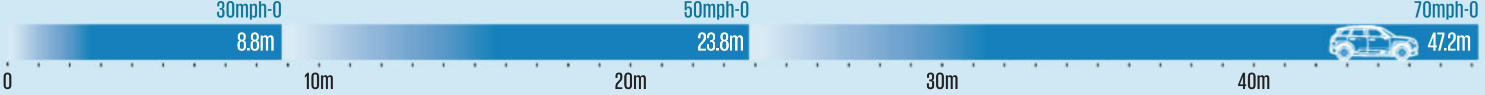
Kia EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line (2024, 9deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 15.7sec at 89.4mph **Standing km** 29.1sec at 107.0mph **30-70mph** 6.4sec **50-80mph** 6.8sec **0-62mph** 7.6sec

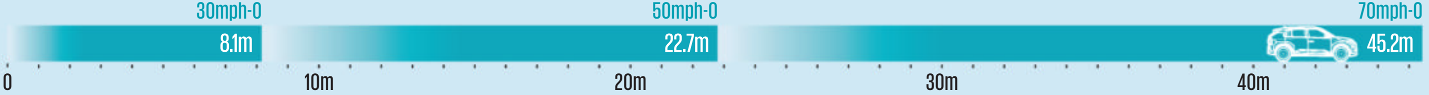


BRAKING

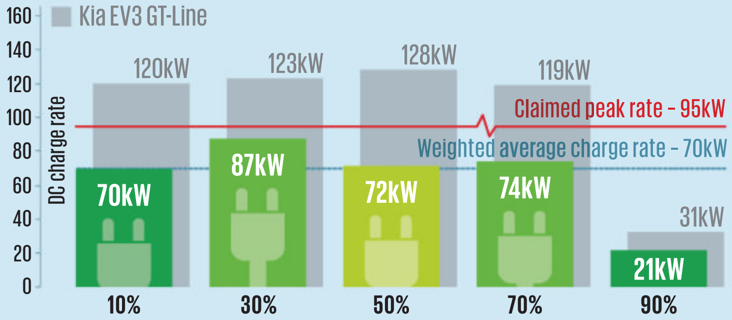
Dry 60-0mph 2.58sec



Kia EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line
Dry 60-0mph 2.41sec

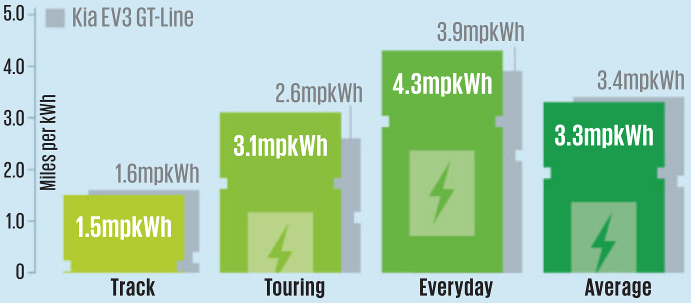


RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

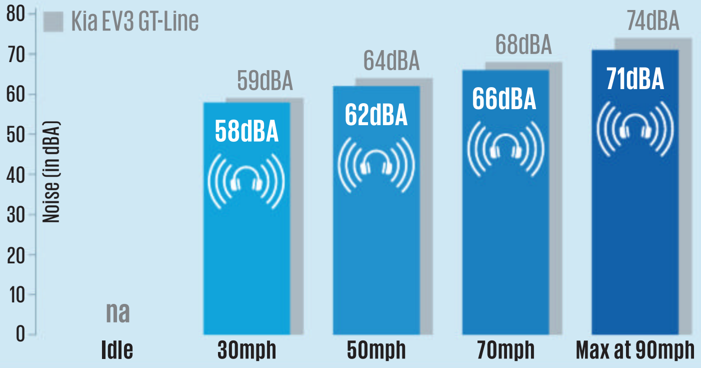


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 4.3mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 162/153/212 miles (average/touring/everyday)

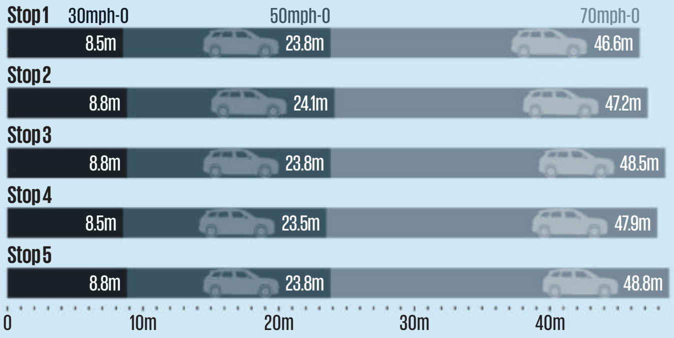


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 2.2m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission. For information on the Aceman, contact Mini UK Customer Services, Summit One, Summit Avenue, Farnborough, Hampshire, GU14 0FB (0800 0836464, mini.co.uk).

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

MINI ACEMAN SE EXCLUSIVE

On-the-road price £38,500
Price as tested £41,600
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £21,550
Contract hire £510 pcm (6+36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £430 pcm (£3000 deposit + 48 months/24,000 miles)
Insurance group 24

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 24cm circular multimedia display with navigation, two-zone climate control, heated sports steering wheel, sports seats
Optional Rebel Red metallic paint £550, black roof £0, 19in Hexagram Spoke alloy wheels £550, Level 2 options package (panoramic sunroof, premium audio, head-up display) £2000

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Front, transverse, FWD
Type Separately excited synchronous motor
Power 215bhp
Torque 243lb ft
Maximum regen capacity 90kW
Battery type Lithium ion (nickel manganese cobalt)
Capacity 54.2/49.2kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 398V
Power to weight 126bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 142lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
Reduction ratio 9.3:1
mph per 1000rpm 8.3
Motor rpm at 70/80mph 8391/9590

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1710kg/1756kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 55%/45%
Drag coefficient 0.27
Wheels 7.5Jx19in
Tyres 225/40 R19 93V, Goodyear Assurance ComfortTred
Spare None (mobility kit)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.3 turns lock to lock; 11.1m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 330mm ventilated discs, one-piston calipers **Rear** 300mm ventilated discs, one-piston calipers **Handbrake type** Electronic, automatic

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating Not tested

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 0g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £13/£26

VERDICT

Usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal

★★★⯪☆

The Mini Aceman may be supposed to split the difference between the Cooper and Countryman, but – for good and for ill – it feels much closer to the former than the latter. That's because it has relatively little more practicality, versatility or range than the Cooper, but it also retains plenty of little-car agility and impish dynamic fun factor.

It might actually be a right-sized electric Mini crossover. If this was the last Mini in existence, you could just about use its DNA to reconstruct a true picture of the firm's modern dynamic identity. Not, perhaps, in terms of its powertrain, but certainly for its ride and handling, which feel entirely authentic.

By class standards, the Aceman should be more spacious, more efficient, go further on a charge and arguably cost less after key options – things that we suspect won't stop it from succeeding.

TESTERS' NOTES

MATT SAUNDERS
There's no reason to put a seatbelt-like textile strap 'spoke' on the steering wheel, or recycled cloth on the fascia, or leather details on the dash, other than to draw the eye and add variety. And variety is good.

ILLYA VERPRAET
There's plenty of fidget and fight about the handling and steering as it is. Add the JCW's extra power and torque, stiffer springs and anti-roll bars, and bigger wheels, and it might well tip over the edge of 'entertaining' and into 'annoying'.

FACELIFT FIXES

- More range, from a bigger battery and/or more efficient motor and rolling chassis.
- Better manual battery regen control will help with that.
- Improved standard equipment level and better-value option packs.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	CUPRA BORN 77KWH E-BOOST V2	**RENAULT SCENIC E-TECH LONG RANGE**	**KIA EV3 81.4KWH GT LINE**	**MINI ACEMAN SE EXCLUSIVE**	**ALFA ROMEO JUNIOR ELETTRICA SPECIALE**	**SMART #1 PREMIUM**
	No compact SUV, but handsome, roomy, desirable and fun to drive. Real-world 250-mile range.	Unlike the Mini, it has abundant rational appeal, and some style and dynamic sophistication too.	Shrunken EV9 stands out more visually than to drive, but more range and space than the Mini.		Pick of the Stellantis compact EVs to drive, though the pricier Veloce is faster and more fun than this is.	Plenty of space and performance for the money, but a bit short on range. ADAS and infotainment systems a little naive.
	★★★★⯪	★★★★☆	★★★★☆		★★★⯪☆	★★★⯪☆
Price	£39,980	£40,940	£39,440		£35,640	£38,895
Power, torque	227bhp, 229lb ft	215bhp, 221lb ft	201bhp, 209lb ft		154bhp, 192lb ft	268bhp, 253lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	7.0sec, 99mph	7.9sec, 106mph	7.9sec, 105mph		9.0sec, 93mph	6.7sec, 112mph
Range, economy	341 miles, 3.9mpkWh	379 miles, 3.6mpkWh	367 miles, 4.1mpkWh		255 miles, 4.1mpkWh	273 miles, 3.7mpkWh

RICHARD LANE

Testing, testing

Buchloe has been turning out belters since 1965 – but that run might now be ending

In next week's mag, you will find the road test for Alpina's new B3 Touring 'GT'. You won't be surprised to learn it's quite a good motor car, but it also sounds a death knell for the outfit that makes it.

On 31 December 2025, ownership of the brand will transfer from the Bovensiepens to the BMW Group, ending six decades of family-run status. There is a possibility that things will continue more or less as they are in terms of the product line-up, but it's a slightly forlorn hope. The fact that Alpina insiders are referring to the B3 GT as 'the last of the last' tells you everything you need to know. It's rather an ominous sign for the man or woman who wants only – ha ha – for a 3 Series with Bentley-grade torque, effortless poise and a truly sumptuous cabin, all underwritten not by 'oh, this rides pretty well for a 190mph car' but genuine comfort and refinement. Rare, too.

So what will happen, beyond already robust B3 residuals getting tungsten bracing? BMW has courted execs from luxury goods giant LMVH – with, one imagines, a view to launching Alpina into the limelight as a super-premium rival to Mercedes' Maybach. That would be a world away from M, which should at least come as a relief to non-nerd BMW salespersons who have struggled to explain to puzzled visitors why the pinstriped car in the corner costs more than an M3 and they won't be getting any sort of discount. Alpina never was that comprehensible to the casuals.

So, rebooting the brand as a rival to Maybach and Bentley's Mulliner arm. It would be a profit-driven enterprise far removed from Burkard Bovensiepen's tangibly beneficial contributions to turbocharging and performance-diesel tech, not to mention his erudite interjections into the German political sphere. It would be for the 1% of the 1%. Which makes me wonder what room this approach leaves for 3 Series- and 5 Series-based models – the heartland of Alpina's output for those who buy the cars to use them. In a Maybach-fighting scenario, only the vast 7 Series and X7 would be suitable conduits. They would have all the walnut trim an oligarch could wish for, but the detail engineering – which in the past has extended to Alpina recasting BMW engine blocks so that they might take an extra turbo – wouldn't be necessary. Power? Sure, plenty. But ALP-marked bespoke rubber and minute tweaks to camber and torque distribution to give the dynamics additional lustre? Seems unlikely.

> **"He agreed it would be like putting a baby in a Eurofighter"**

All of which is to say, if you have ever hankered after a factory-fresh Alpina of the trad school, get it now. In fact, a couple of months ago was the ideal time, if you want all the bells and whistles. A full Lavalina leather interior runs to about £14k, which is why it's rare to see it on anything less than a B7. However, with the potential imminent demise of the B3 and B5, people are going full Sultan of Brunei and ticking every box in sight. There has duly been a run on Lavalina, and since the saddlery in Buchloe can only upholster five interiors each month (an XB7 cabin represents around 120 hours of work), it has now been taken off the menu. So yes, there is a waiting list for having your rear armrest trimmed in the hide of some of the most pampered livestock on the planet, with its 'cloth-like' softness. Such is the quirky world of Alpina.

As for why the Bovensiepens are getting out, Alpinas are all about 'no compromise', which is currently incompatible with EV tech. Andreas Bovensiepen has also said that hiring good software engineers would be ruinously expensive, and they would be crucial if Alpina were to continue differentiating itself from BMW on an engineering level. With the brand equity at an all-time high, now is a sensible time to offload.

It really is the end of an era, and as Autocar's resident Alpina tragic, I find it so sad. Still, there have been some excellent moments. A D3 S to Turin and back at 40-something-mpg and an unprintable average speed; a B3 from Munich to London in one hit; the elderly chap near Liège who stopped in his tracks at the sight of the B4 S I'd parked up: "Woah, a genuine Al-pee-naah!"

My old B4 S long-termer was the one I fell hard for. I can remember travelling to Buchloe in 2018 to collect it, my wife joining the trip. We landed late and a techie from the factory was generous enough to shuttle us from the airport. At a steady 220kph, he asked if we would share the driving home. I said probably not, because Charlotte hadn't driven in 10 years. He glanced at her over his shoulder, turned back to the road, nodded and in Arnie-accented English agreed that it would be "like putting a baby in a Eurofighter". Gold.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

AUTOCAR IMAGE

AUTOCAR IMAGE
AC25 BSY

New Cars 2025

From a £7500, 8bhp Citroën EV to a £3m, 1184bhp Ferrari hypercar and everything in between, here are this year's star newcomers

BY JAMES ATTWOOD, JONATHAN BRYCE, CHARLIE MARTIN, FELIX PAGE, WILL RIMELL AND JACK WARRICK

AUTOCAR IMAGE

AUTOCAR IMAGE

AUTOCAR IMAGE

Make some noise

This vintage year for elite sports cars will have an end-of-days vibe to it

Ferrari 12Cilindri

ON SALE MAY

Twelve booming cylinders, a big old snout and a tremendous 819bhp on tap: the Ferrari 12Cilindri is everything a proper GT should be.

The centrepiece, of course, is its 6.5-litre V12. Unlike that in the rival Aston Martin Vanquish, it's naturally aspirated and revs to a screeching 9500rpm. "An engine to die for", in the words of Matt Prior. But with the V12 requiring, according to Ferrari's Enrico Galliera, an "absolutely stunning" amount of work to ensure it complies with Euro 6e emissions rules – and Euro 7 coming into force this year – could it be the last of the type?

Alpine A110 Ultime

ON SALE JUNE

The sun is setting on the car that proved once and for all that Renault's got what it takes to fight Europe's best. The Ultime is one last crack at the likes of Porsche: a super-light, track-focused special honed by Alpine's Formula 1 team. Its aero package produces an extra 160kg of downforce compared with the A110 R on which it's based, and the additional 49bhp required the fitment of a new gearbox. A fitting end for a hero.

Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale

ON SALE JANUARY

First Fuoriserie (that's 'custom built' in Inglese) gets a bored-out version of the 2.9-litre twin-turbo V6 from the Giulia and Stelvio Quadrifoglio that, mounted amidships, sends up to 641bhp to the rear wheels. But that's all secondary to the 33 Stradale's striking design, which references the drop-dead-gorgeous original from 1967. A total of 33 will be built at a cost of £1.7 million each. If your Euromillions numbers come up, this is the car to have.

AC COBRA GT

On sale April

Reborn with aluminium chassis, carbonfibre body and 654bhp V8. Four-pot Ace also available.

ALFA ROMEO JUNIOR IBRIDA

On sale May

Alfa's small crossover gets a 134bhp 1.2-litre hybrid and more ornate grille.

ALFA ROMEO TONALE

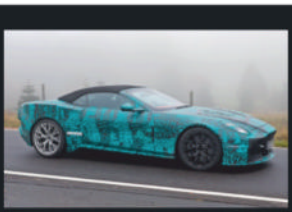
On sale August

SUV gains a revised interior with new centre console, rotary drive selector and reworked display screens.

ARIEL NOMAD 2

On sale February

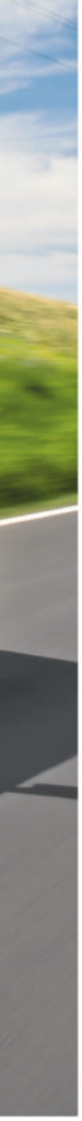
Nutter's choice of off-roaders returns with Focus ST power and 715kg kerb weight. Mind-boggling fun.



ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH VOLANTE

On sale July

Drop-top V12 super-GT could nudge two tonnes but pace is likely to be mighty.



THE RETRO REVIVAL CONTINUES

FIAT GRANDE PANDA

On sale April

Cute new crossover stays true to the Giorgetto Giugiaro-designed original in both styling and spirit, using the same underpinnings as the Citroën C3 to hit a starting price below £22,000.

CITROEN AMI

On sale April

UK's cheapest electric 'car' gets a distinctive new look inspired by the 2CV, with round headlights and vent-aping grooves on its flanks. It keeps the same 28mph top speed as before, though.

RENAULT 4

On sale July

It must have been Opposite Day when Renault's product planners conceived the new 4 and 5. Arriving just months after the 5, the 4 is very similar underneath but has acres more practicality.

Tester's highlight

POLESTAR 5

Polestar has a big design and development base at Horiba MIRA proving ground, home of the Autocar road test, so I've been looking at mules of this car for years, which really builds an appetite. Given how good the Polestar 2 and 3 are, I'm itching to find out what this company can do with its own platform architecture and a range-topping development budget. It is aiming at best-in-class handling – and given the class includes the Porsche Taycan, it will be fascinating to find out if the firm can deliver it.

MATT SAUNDERS

Polestar 5
Verification Prototype #1

Porsche 911 GT3

ON SALE APRIL

The GT3 has for a long while been the only 911 you can buy with an atmospheric flat six, but that might not be the case for much longer. "I don't think we can handle Euro 7 without electrification or without turbos," Porsche GT boss Andreas Preuninger told Autocar recently. Still, if this is it, it's going out on a high note: 503bhp, 347lb ft and a 9000rpm redline, with a shorter final drive ratio to ensure you're hitting the limit more often.

Lamborghini Temerario

ON SALE DECEMBER

Huracán's replacement gets a 4.0-litre V8 that, combined with three electric motors, puts out a huge 907bhp. But only a small fraction of that is thanks to the motors, which are used to fill the gap in torque delivery left by the fitment of two whopping great turbochargers. The set-up's good for 0-62mph in 2.7sec and allows for new tricks, such as a drift handling mode inspired by the Huracán Sterrato.

Ford Mustang GTD

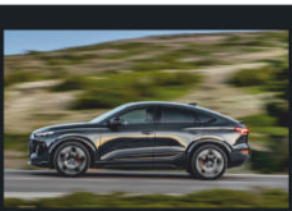
ON SALE JULY

Before you ask, no, it's not a diesel. That 'D' actually stands for Daytona, hinting at the track-focused billing of what is the most extreme Pony Car to date. Its 5.2-litre V8 is borrowed from Shelby's GT500 but has a smaller supercharger pulley plus a modified intake and exhaust to boost it north of 800bhp. It's also got a dry sump to ensure it isn't starved of oil on track. There's just one catch: applications to buy one closed long ago.

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE VOLANTE

On sale August

Rowdy sports car drops its top so you can hear its V8 with even greater clarity.



AUDI Q6 SPORTBACK

On sale February

Coupé roofline beats the range of the Q6 SUV by 15 miles but trades away 15 litres of boot space.

BENTLEY FLYING SPUR PHEV

On sale January

New 771bhp plug-in hybrid set-up replaces the W12 and offers 47 miles of EV driving.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

BMW M2 CS

On sale September

Weight savings, rear spoiler and aggressive suspension set-up will prime this sports car for track use.

BMW M3 TOURING CS

On sale May

Even hotter estate to get 542bhp – or more – plus reworked chassis and chunkier splitters.

Plug and play

EVs are going to ramp up the driver fun in 2025

Hyundai Ioniq 6 N

ON SALE DECEMBER

(What's the Story) Morning Glory, The Bends, Nevermind... Second albums are always difficult, but sometimes they're absolutely game-changing. Hyundai will certainly be hoping for a Led Zeppelin II moment with the launch of its second electric sports car. The Ioniq 5 N has completely overturned the misconception that EVs can't be fun, with its realistic 'manual gearbox', genuinely enjoyable 'engine note' and scintillating dynamics, so the pressure is on the hot Ioniq 6 to take things one step further. Expect a ludicrous power figure and a rapid 0-62mph time, of course, but no doubt there will be a hefty dose of chassis tweaking and electrickery deployed to ensure this is more than merely a quick car.

AUTOCAR IMAGE
H6 HYU

Tester's highlight

HYUNDAI IONIQ 6

The Ioniq 6 is a frustratingly 'almost' car. It could be so, so good, but the proportions aren't quite right, the driving position is off, and it doesn't ride as well as it should. Those last two points could definitely be remedied with a facelift. Add in the latest battery and motor tech for even better range and efficiency, and it could finally be the wafty streamliner saloon we always hoped it would be. Bring on the N version too.

ILLYA VERPRAET

Mercedes-AMG GT 4dr

ON SALE DECEMBER

Has the Porsche Taycan had it too good for too long? Mercedes is working on its own lightning-fast four-door, which should outpunch today's V8-engined AMG GT saloon in just about every respect. Except, perhaps, noise. The first full-fat AMG EV will ride on a bespoke platform for electric sports cars and is tipped to pack as much as 1000bhp and 1000lb ft. We're off to buy shares in Michelin.

AUTOCAR IMAGE
AC25 BSY

AUTOCAR IMAGE

Audi RS Q6

ON SALE OCTOBER

With nearly 500bhp, the SQ6 E-tron is hardly lethargic, so Audi Sport's 600bhp-plus RS version of the Macan twin should be pretty rapid.

CITROEN C4

On sale April

New look inspired by the Oli concept and a dashboard overhaul for this hatchback, which is now auto-only.

CUPRA TERRAMAR

On sale March

Brand's final pure-ICE car is a Volkswagen Tiguan twin with added dynamic flair and up to 268bhp.

DACIA BIGSTER

On sale March

Stretched Duster does a pretty good impression of a Land Rover Defender for less than £30,000.

DACIA JOGGER

On sale June

Fresh styling for the UK's cheapest seven-seater, which is also in line for a more potent hybrid engine.

DS N°4

On sale May

Plush, high-riding hatchback is due a mid-life update. Is it finally time for an electric option?

Alpine A290

ON SALE AUGUST

"The saviour of the hot hatch", "a modern-day Clio 182", "a proper electric driver's car – at last!". Everything you've read online is true: the hot version of the new Renault 5 is just as quick, engaging and fun as we had hoped, which proves one of our favourite types of car can survive into the EV era.

MG Cyberster 2+2

ON SALE AUGUST

Everyone's getting in on the retro revival act, but we'll admit that the MGB GT wasn't on our 2025 bingo card. Admittedly, the hard-top Cyberster doesn't look much like its ancestor, but as it's due to arrive on the B GT's 60th birthday, you can't really avoid the comparison.

AC Ace Electric

ON SALE MAY

Quick, quaint and really quite expensive, this reborn '60s roadster packs 300bhp into a 1134kg shell – and costs more than a 911 GT3 RS.

Kia EV6 GT

ON SALE JUNE

Kia's 577bhp Porsche Taycan chaser will be zhuzhed up with the 641bhp powertrain and simulated gearchanges from the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N. Drift mode will stay.

Maserati MC20 Folgore

ON SALE OCTOBER

The electric reinvention of Maserati continues apace and now it finally delivers us the electric supercar promised back in 2020. The flagship of the expanding Folgore range will use the same chassis as the petrol car but with its snarling Nettuno V6 swapped for suitably silent but violent electric motors – possibly three of 'em, like the Granturismo.

CAR MAKERS FACE NEW RULES IN 2025

IMPORT TARIFFS

In a bid to stop China's state-supported EV makers from dominating the European market, the EU has levied lofty import tariffs on all Chinese-built electric cars, including those produced there by Western marques. Incoming US president Donald Trump has threatened to do similar for European cars in the US.

GSR2 SAFETY REGS

All new cars sold in the EU – and logically the UK – after 2024 must be equipped with safety systems including a driver drowsiness detector, lane keep assist and intelligent speed assist (the one that bongs). The move has already killed off several models that weren't cost-effective to upgrade and has big cost implications for traditionally cheaper cars like superminis.

EMISSIONS RULES

Car makers must boost their EV sales share in the UK from 22% to 28% in 2025 or face heavy fines, and with market demand still lagging way behind that figure, ICE car sales will be artificially restricted to alter the balance. New EU rules, meanwhile, impose a fleet CO_2 emissions target of 93.6g/km this year, a 15% drop from 2021's average.

Polestar 5

ON SALE SEPTEMBER

British-engineered super-saloon has up to 974bhp and radical new fast-charging tech, so it will be rapid off the mark and at the plug.

DS N°7

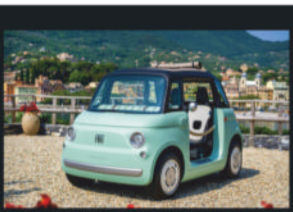
On sale November

Family SUV has been around since 2017, so a styling and technology refresh beckons.

FIAT 500E

On sale December

A bigger battery is part of a mid-life update for the pint-sized Piedmontese. But will it boost sales?



FIAT TOPOLINO

On sale July

Meet the Ami Superleggera. Cubic microcar gets the 1950s design treatment and ditches its doors.

FORD E-TOURNEO COURIER

On sale March

Berlingo-baiter gets a 134bhp motor and a 43kWh battery for a 179-mile range.

FORD PUMA GEN-E

On sale March

UK's best-selling car plugs in to take on the Peugeot e-2008. As close as we will get to a Fiesta EV (for now).

Germany's premium push

Expect plenty of upmarket action from Audi, BMW, Mercedes and Porsche this year

BMW iX3

ON SALE DECEMBER

Previewed by the Vision Neue Klasse X, the successor to today's iX3 will set the tone for BMW's future electric line-up. Much of that concept's design will be carried over to the new SUV, such as its fresh kidney grille, new LED headlights and flatter, more imposing silhouette. BMW's sixth-generation eDrive system is claimed to give an efficiency boost of up to 25% over the brand's existing EVs, with range bolstered by around 30%.

Mercedes CLA

ON SALE OCTOBER

The new CLA will be the first series-production Merc offered with both combustion and battery-electric power. While the saloon has been dubbed 'electric first', it will be available with a new 249bhp electrified engine. A dual-motor 527bhp rival to BMW's i4 M50 will top the line-up.

BMW M5 Touring

ON SALE JANUARY

Hallowed super-estate returns with raunchier styling and a 717bhp plug-in hybrid powertrain.

BMW Skytop

ON SALE AUGUST

Just 50 examples of BMW's gorgeous convertible concept will be made, possibly carrying the Z8 name.

Merc-AMG GT Pro

ON SALE FEBRUARY

Performance connoisseur's super-sports GT gets 4WD, four seats and an 805bhp range-topping PHEV.

BMW 2 Series Gran Coupé

ON SALE JANUARY

Design mods and chassis upgrades seek to make this front-driven junior saloon more dynamic.

BMW iX

ON SALE JUNE

Mid-life update for this large electric SUV brings a huge range increase, plus new design elements. *That* grille will remain, though.

Merc-AMG CLE 63

ON SALE NOVEMBER

No plug-in hybrid here: instead, it has AMG's traditional 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8 with a host of styling adjustments.

Tester's highlight

FORD MUSTANG GTD

I think anyone who works for this mag would be fascinated to try the Mustang GTD. The world's favourite muscle car, given the Porsche 911 GT3 RS treatment with what feels not far off an unlimited budget? It promises to be one of those rare, mad, special creations.

RICHARD LANE

GENESIS GV60 MAGMA

On sale July

Magma performance arm's first UK model is set to be a more luxurious take on the riotous Hyundai Ioniq 5 N.

JAECOO J5

On sale August

Toothy SUV is China's answer to the Honda HR-V and Hyundai Kona, coming with petrol and EV options.

JEEP RECON

On sale December

Jeep's European push will include this potent off-roader intended as an EV equivalent of the Wrangler.

JEEP WAGONEER S

On sale November

Wagoneer S also joins Jeep's EV range, with 592bhp, a 300-mile range and 0-62mph in 3.2sec.

KGM ACTYON

On sale February

Smartly styled SUV is based on the Torres and brings petrol power and an affordable price.

Audi RS6 E-tron

ON SALE NOVEMBER

Audi's hot RS6 will be back this year, but not as you remember it. Planned to be badged RS6 E-tron, the high-performance model will be available as an Avant estate, but also as a saloon for the first time since 2010. As a result, the combustion RS6 will be renamed RS7, as per the brand's new naming structure. Expect over 600bhp and 700lb ft...

Audi A5

ON SALE JANUARY

A4 replacement gets a mix of petrol, diesel and PHEV powertrains in estate and saloon bodystyles, plus there's a hot S variant.

Audi A6 E-tron

ON SALE MARCH

Electric saloon and estate versions of the A6 E-tron will arrive with up to 463 miles of range along with a 543bhp range-topper.

Audi A7

ON SALE AUGUST

New naming strategy means the combustion-engined A6 will be replaced by the A7. It's expected to go big on hybrid power.

Audi Q3

ON SALE SEPTEMBER

Visual and powertrain upgrades are destined for this popular mid-sized SUV, with interior design cues taken from the larger Q5.

Audi Q5

ON SALE MARCH

Family SUV gets a V6 plus an upgraded range of hybrid engines and design inspiration from the electric Q6 E-tron.

CAN EUROPE KEEP CHINA AT BAY?

If our testers' recent verdicts on the likes of the Omoda E5, BYD Sealion 07 and Leapmotor C10 are any guide, Europe's car execs can sleep soundly in the knowledge that their cars have superior powertrains, chassis, interiors and infotainment interfaces. But China's EV firms have a crucial cost advantage that's helping them to rapidly increase their market footprint nonetheless.

Cue drastic investment in new EV platforms, innovative battery chemistries, infotainment tech and next-level driver assistance programmes from Europe's worried 'legacy' marques, plus a set of tariffs imposed on every Chinese-built EV imported to the EU. Will that be enough to ensure Europe's car makers can keep playing happily in their own back garden? And if Chinese cars remain competitive even without a substantial price advantage, what's the point in them sticking around if market demand for battery EVs doesn't pick up soon? Either way, 2025 looks to be a decisive year.

FELIX PAGE

BYD GOES BIG

DENZA Z9 GT

On sale October

Upmarket sub-brand of BYD was originally a joint venture with Mercedes but now has full control over its destiny. Its first car is a 952bhp electric GT.

DENZA BAO 5

On sale October

Land Cruiser rival gets a 677bhp range-extender. It is badged as a Fangchengbao ('formula leopard') in China but is strongly tipped for a European rebrand.

YANGWANG U8

On sale July

Tank-turning SUV brings silly stats and gimmicks galore with 1180bhp, a near-3500kg kerb weight and an equally silly name.

BYD SEAGULL

On sale November

Dacia Spring rival is poised to swoop in on the UK's affordable EV market with a 200-mile range.

BYD SEAL 06 GT

On sale May

Vital Seal hatchback is set to make a splash against the venerable Cupra Born and Volkswagen ID 3.

BYD SEAL

On sale April

Critical tech updates and battery changes look to keep it fresh.

BYD SEALION 7

On sale February

A Sealion 7 or a Model Y? We might have the choice as this 523bhp, 311-mile EV is prepared for Europe.

Porsche 718

ON SALE DECEMBER

One of the year's most hotly anticipated arrivals. The next 718 Boxster and Cayman will be electric-only and based on a new platform, with batteries stacked behind the cabin. Dual motors derived from Formula E are intended to deliver a clever blend of performance and efficiency.

KGM O100

On sale December

Brutish EV will be one of the first four-wheel-drive electric pick-up trucks to go on sale in the UK.

KGM TORRES HYBRID

On sale May

This small electrified SUV will be a left-field alternative to cars such as the MG HS and Dacia Duster.

LAND ROVER DEFENDER OCTA

On sale February

The most powerful and capable Defender yet? A 626bhp V8 suggests so.

LEAPMOTOR B10

On sale August

This Renault 5-sized hatchback made its debut in Paris last year and a UK launch is on the horizon.

LEAPMOTOR C10

On sale January

Family SUV is similar in proportion to Volkswagen's ID 4, but with a 262-mile range, it is not as leggy.

Make or break

These cars are going to be crucial in shaping their makers' future

Jeep Compass

ON SALE NOVEMBER

Jeep's assault on the lucrative compact SUV market will sit above the Avenger and use Stellantis's STLA Medium platform, which makes it a close relation to the Peugeot 3008 and Vauxhall Grandland. Rivalling the Volvo EC40 and Volkswagen Tiguan, the Compass will be the only car on its platform to be offered with a pure-combustion engine. It is also likely to come with the option of a 134bhp mild-hybrid petrol and a 207bhp electric motor with a 73kWh battery.

Cupra Raval

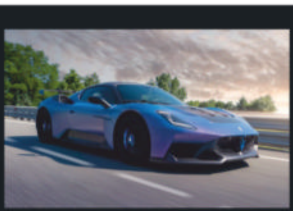
ON SALE DECEMBER

Forget the World Cup qualifiers: the fiercest international showdown of 2025 could well be when Spain's Cupra Raval squares up to France's Renault 5. Cupra's challenger certainly has the readies to take the win: a circa-£25,000 price, a sumptuous interior and a whole array of digital tricks. Cupra has been growing in recent years and this could be a transformative model for the brand.

LEXUS LBX MORIZO

On sale May

Lexus's small SUV gets fire in its belly courtesy of the GR Yaris's 1.6-litre turbocharged three-pot.



MASERATI MC20 GT2 STRADALE

On sale November

Track-ready rocket is 60kg lighter than standard – and Maserati's dearest car yet.

MAZDA CX-80

On sale January

Volvo XC90 rival gets seven seats, a proper diesel engine and class-leading towing capacity.

MERCEDES-MAYBACH SL

On sale July

"Sportiest" Maybach yet has a 577bhp V8 and all the bling a dictator could want.

MG 4

On sale March

Popular hatch is due an interior and tech update to keep it on the pace with rivals such as Kia's Niro EV.

Range Rover Electric

ON SALE OCTOBER

After years of teasers, spy shots and claims of a stacked order book, it's finally time for Land Rover to make its first foray into the world of electric cars. This is in some ways a subtle debut, because the new EV has the same looks and underpinnings as its combustion-engined counterparts – but with whisper-quiet propulsion. It's not just refinement that benefits from going EV, though. JLR claims the Range Rover's motors allow snappier reactions to any slippage at each wheel, reducing the reaction time of its traction control from 100 milliseconds to a single millisecond. Could this be the most capable Range Rover to date, as well as the most luxurious? We'd count on it.

WHY THERE'S A JAGUAR-SHAPED HOLE HERE

The final month of 2024 brought a flurry of Jaguar news, first with a new logo and *that* promo video, and then with the unveiling of the bold concept car that previews its new line of upmarket luxury EVs. So how is Jaguar following that up in 2025? Simple: with absolutely nothing.

Well, that's not quite true, but for the first time since the brand was launched as SS Cars 89 years ago, you won't be able to walk into a dealership and buy a new Jaguar this year. Instead, 2025 will serve as what boss Rawdon Glover calls a "reset period". It's born of necessity: the new cars are still being refined and work is needed on the factories so they can produce EVs. It's tough news for Jaguar dealers, though.

It's also an opportunity for Jaguar bosses to explain and sell its rebooted brand, no easy feat given the significance of the reinvention. Will it work? We'll find out next year by the length of the queues outside (presumably very hungry) Jaguar dealers.

JAMES ATTWOOD

Fiat 500 Ibrida

ON SALE OCTOBER

The petrol-powered 500 lives on! A long-term future was secured for Turin's big-selling city car with the recent confirmation of this new hybrid version. It is effectively a 500e retrofitted with a petrol engine – most likely Stellantis's ubiquitous 134bhp 1.2-litre mild hybrid. It comes as Fiat struggles to sell the EV, idling its factory.

Tester's highlight

CITROEN AMI

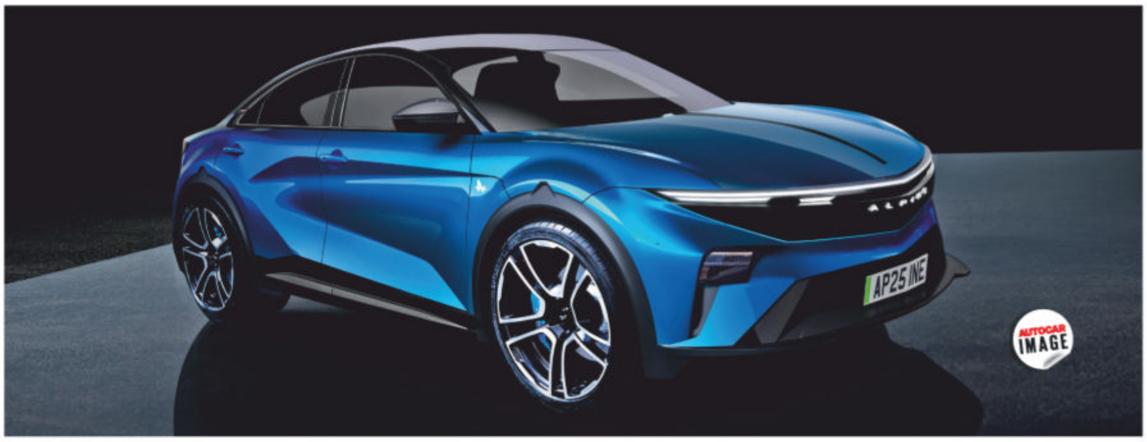
I really wanted to like the Citroën Ami the first time around, and in some respects I did. But it's a quadricycle that just asks you to make too many compromises, mostly about how terrified you're prepared to feel. So I dearly hope the revised version sorts the shortcomings.

MATT PRIOR

Alpine A390

ON SALE DECEMBER

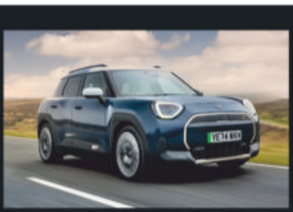
Meet the "A110 for five". Previewed by a concept at the 2024 Paris motor show, the A390 is the French brand's first SUV – and, it hopes, a cash cow to fund its next-generation sports cars. But the firm claims not to have compromised on driving dynamics, having benchmarked the crossover against the sports car and developed a trick torque-vectoring system for its tri-motor powertrain. A rival for the Porsche Macan Electric, it's expected to arrive priced north of £60,000.



MG ES5

On sale April

Based on the 4 EV's platform, the ES5 replaces the ZS EV and is said to have the world's thinnest battery.



MINI ACEMAN

On sale January

Renault 4 rival sits between Countryman and Cooper, with an upmarket interior and enjoyable handling.

MINI CONVERTIBLE

On sale February

Drop-top versions of the definitive small car get 161bhp and 201bhp petrol engines. Priced from £27k.

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS EVs

On sale May

Mini's go-faster arm goes electric as hot Aceman and Cooper get 254bhp.

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS PETROL

On sale January

Hottest petrol hatches are auto-only, with racy styling and more muscle.

Separated at birth

Renault 5

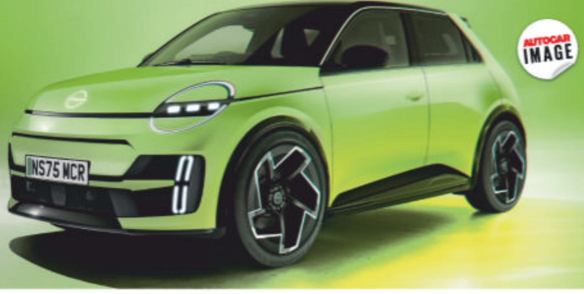
ON SALE APRIL

The 5 wowed at its launch, with its sleek retro styling, and it didn't disappoint when we got to drive it. It rides and handles well, is reasonably spacious and, starting from £23,000, is a genuinely affordable electric car. Viva la Renaulution, etc.

Nissan Micra

ON SALE OCTOBER

Squint a bit and you can see the Renault 5 links in the concept car that previews the new Micra. But while it shares a platform and will be built in France, much of its design and engineering work has been done by Nissan (and in the UK). We've been promised a "sporty urban" car.



THE GREAT STELLANTIS GENRE-BENDERS

VAUXHALL MANTA: DUE DEC
DS N°8: DUE DEC
PEUGEOT E-408: DUE MAR

Peugeot has found success with the unusual 408, a sort of saloon-cum-crossover-cum-SUV that makes more sense if you just admire it. An electric version will arrive this year with 207bhp and a 281-mile range.

In the spirit of Stellantis sharing, it will inspire the forthcoming DS N°8, a posher and more avant-garde take on the formula but based on the same underpinnings as the larger Peugeot 3008.

In turn, that will inspire the new Manta, which revives an old Opel nameplate but has actually never been offered as a Vauxhall before.

It's a triple threat of genre-straddling goodness that should cover a significant chunk of the market.

Citroën C3 Aircross

ON SALE MAY

The next-gen C3 Aircross's Smart Car platform will enable it to offer seven seats despite a length of just 4.39m. Taking aim at the Dacia Jogger, it will arrive with petrol and MHEV power. An EV will follow.

Vauxhall Frontera

ON SALE MARCH

Fancy your compact budget seven-seater with a British badge? Thankfully, the Stellantis Smart Car platform will also underpin Vauxhall's revival of the Frontera. Prices start at £23,495 for both petrol and (five-seat-only) electric versions.

Suzuki eVitara

ON SALE OCTOBER

Suzuki staged the European launch of its first EV on an ice rink, mystifyingly. But the car is self-explanatory: a decent-sized SUV with up to 172bhp, a 250-mile range and a mid-£30k starting price.

Toyota Urban Cruiser

ON SALE OCTOBER

Having manufactured the Swace (née Corolla) and Across (RAV4) for Suzuki, it's Toyota's turn to receive a gift: its Urban Cruiser will be built by Suzuki in India and is basically a reworked eVitara.

MOBILIZE DUO
On sale June
Spiritual successor to the Twizy goes posh (it has airbags!) to take on the Citroën Ami.

MORGAN MIDSUMMER
On sale April
This finely detailed £200,000 barchetta is a Plus Six that has been reinvigorated by Pininfarina.

MORGAN PLUS SIX PINNACLE
On sale July
Venerable flagship bows out with limited-run £97k special and 3.0 straight six.

NISSAN LEAF
On sale December
It's a Leaf, but not as we know it: expect the British-built EV to morph into an SUV for its next generation.

OMODA 9
On sale June
Have there really been nine Omodas already? Of course not: the number just signifies it's a big SUV.

Given how expensive developing cars is, it's no wonder companies frequently share platforms. But even when they do, the results aren't always that similar, as these 2025 newcomers show

Tester's highlight

RENAULT 4

I'm dead keen to see and try the new Renault 4, due this summer, because I loved the original in its day and I reckon today's Renault Group has done a very decent job of celebrating its heritage with credible moderns (Alpine A110, Renault 5 EV). If it can keep the original 4's versatility along with its aura of cheerful simplicity – and stir in a decent helping of the famous, age-old ride suppleness – I'll be pleased. **STEVE CROPLEY**

NEW CARS WE DON'T GET BUT REALLY WANT

KIA TASMAN
It is basically Kia going full Aussie ute. Strewth!

ZEEKR MIX
It's just a really cool Chinese minivan with electric power.

XIAOMI SU7 ULTRA
This is Ford boss Jim Farley's favourite EV.

LANCIA YPSILON HF
Yes, it's basically a restyled Corsa, but for the love of Miki Biasion, we want it.

CHANGAN LUMIN
Chinese brand's electric city car could be mistaken for a baby Mini. And prices start at roughly £4000...

SKODA KYLAQ
Built with a focus on India but that never stopped the Ford Ecosport (no further questions, please).

Alfa Romeo Junior Veloce

ON SALE JANUARY

Alfa Romeo's return to small cars is hugely significant for the brand and the Junior will be expected to help deliver a big chunk of the company's future sales. It certainly looks the part and the battery-powered Elettrica Veloce version offers more driving fun than many electric crossovers.

Abarth 600e

ON SALE MARCH

It might look like a character from Cars that went out on an all-night bender and got a tattoo, but the most powerful Abarth to date is essentially an Alfa Romeo Junior Veloce stuffed inside a Fiat 600e shell. Our first outing in it suggests it isn't quite as wild as its bodywork suggests but it could win favour as a comparatively affordable fast EV.

PEUGEOT 308
On sale November
Volkswagen Golf rival will receive a styling refresh and doubtless some revived powertrains.

PEUGEOT E-3008/5008
On sale March
The line-ups for these French electric SUVs will gain new four-wheel-drive and long-range variants.

POLESTAR 3 SINGLE MOTOR
On sale June
Polestar's biggest car drops a motor to gain extra range for a lower price.

RENAULT AUSTRAL
On sale July
Range-topper is in line for a host of updates as part of a facelift in a bid to keep up with rivals.

RENAULT CLIO
On sale December
Supermini is set to move onto all-new underpinnings and will go hybrid-only in the process.

I've got Seoul

South Korea's Hyundai and Kia stablemates are facing a busy 12 months

Kia's biggest year yet

EV4

ON SALE DECEMBER

Tesla beware! Kia's coming for the Model 3 with its new EV4, the Korean brand's first electric saloon. UK-bound versions are likely to be offered with 215bhp front-wheel-drive and 320bhp four-wheel-drive options, although a hotter GT variant is also on the cards. A hatchback version (pictured) is on the way, too.

The Kia Concept PV5
PV5

PV5

ON SALE OCTOBER

Kia has its sights set on the evergreen Ford Transit Custom with the new PV5, its first-ever van. It's targeting a punchy starting price of just €35,000 (£28,900), undercutting most other electric vans, and a seven-seat people-mover version is on the way too. Could it change the van game for good?

Tester's highlight

ALPINE A290

There's nothing I enjoy driving more than an excellent hot hatch but there's been a dearth of them recently. Matt Prior's glowing first drive of the Alpine A290 EV suggests there's every reason to be very excited about its August arrival.

RACHEL BURGESS

Sportage

ON SALE JUNE

One of the UK's best-sellers gets EV9-inspired looks as part of its fifth-generation mid-life facelift to keep it high in the charts. The hybrid powertrain introduces a new 'Infant' mode, with a smoother power delivery.

K4

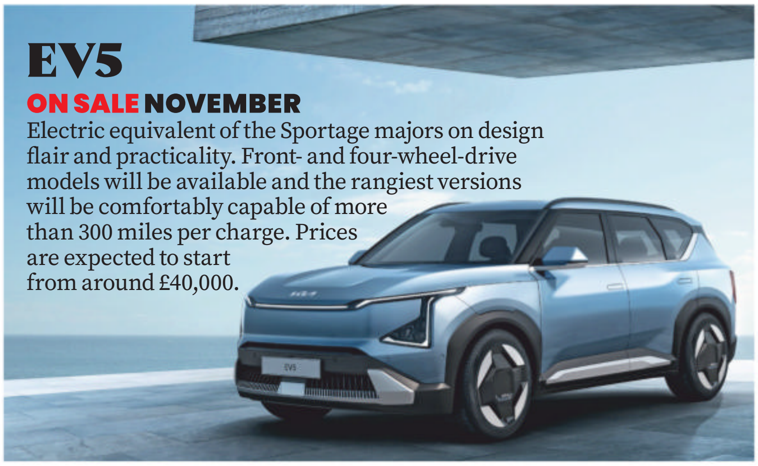
ON SALE DECEMBER

A new petrol hatch – in 2025? You betcha. The K4 is tipped to arrive as a replacement for the Ceed, packing a turbocharged 1.6-litre four and putting out 190bhp.

EV5

ON SALE NOVEMBER

Electric equivalent of the Sportage majors on design flair and practicality. Front- and four-wheel-drive models will be available and the rangiest versions will be comfortably capable of more than 300 miles per charge. Prices are expected to start from around £40,000.



EV9 GT

ON SALE JULY

Got a big family but a lead right foot? You'll like the EV9 GT, a seven-seat, 2.5-tonne electric SUV that packs a whopping 501bhp. Supercar pace, in other words. It should handle, too, because it was developed at the Nürburgring Nordschleife.

RENAULT RAFALE PHEV

On sale January

SUV-coupé gains plug-in hybrid 4WD option fettled by Alpine. It offers 62 miles of electric-only range.

ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST

On sale February

One of the final Rolls to draw power from a V12, the Series II takes some design cues from the Spectre.

SKODA ELROQ

On sale March

First car to embody Skoda's new 'Modern Solid' design is a £31,500 crossover with 230-plus miles of range.

SKODA ENYAQ

On sale May

A major update is inbound. It will take design influence from the 7S concept and use more efficient powertrains.

SKODA KODIAQ vRS

On sale April

Gets Golf GTI power. That's 262bhp and seven seats for the ultimate Saturday morning footy runabout.

Four new Hyundais to get excited about

Ioniq 9

ON SALE NOVEMBER
Previously, we had the Ferrari LaFerrari, McLaren P1 and Porsche 918 Spyder. Now, Hyundai's Ioniq 9 is the final piece of what could be considered the new 'Holy Trinity' – only this time it's made up of electric MPVs. Joining the Kia EV9 and Volvo EX90, the Ioniq 9 is a development of the Seven concept shown three years ago. It offers upwards of 350 miles of range and 378bhp. Pricing? From around £90k.

Nexo

ON SALE OCTOBER
Hydrogen is not dead, says Hyundai. A new hydrogen-fuel-cell Nexo is on the way, having been previewed by the efficient Initium concept. That brings a range of 404 miles between fill-ups and a little more power too.

Inster

ON SALE MARCH
The Inster is Hyundai's electric take on city cars like the Fiat Panda. It offers 229 miles of range and S-Class-like reclining seats for just over £25,000. A rufty-tufty Cross version (pictured) is also on the way.

Ioniq 6

ON SALE OCTOBER
The mid-life update for Hyundai's drag-busting, Tesla Model 3-rivalling electric saloon will include a refreshed design inspired by the petrol Sonata, plus a bigger battery – and therefore a longer range than the current 338 miles.

CHINESE NEWCOMERS FOR UK

GWM ORA 07

On sale May
Quirky-looking 07 will arrive as GWM's second model. It will have 402bhp and an expected £35,000 starting price.

LEAPMOTOR T03

On sale January
EV from Stellantis-backed brand. The 165-mile supermini is a rival to the Dacia Spring and has a sub-£20,000 starting price.

LEVC L380

On sale December
Eight-seat MPV, anyone? The L380 is a four-row luxury electric transporter inspired by the world of airline travel.

SKYWELL Q

On sale August
A new name to the UK, this VW ID 3 rival will offer up to 300 miles of range. It will join the BE11 crossover and Skyhome limo.

OMODA 7

On sale November
Essentially a more rugged and boxy reworking of the Omoda 5, the 7 will be sold in the UK with petrol and PHEV powertrains.

JAECOO J7

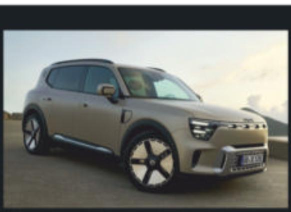
On sale February
An electric SUV, the J7 is aimed at "mature buyers" and puts a focus on luxury. Its Cadillac-style grille will surely turn heads.

XPENG G6

On sale March
Positioned to take on the Tesla Model Y, the G6 will be Xpeng's first electric car to go on sale in the UK.

SKYWELL SKYHOME

On sale November
Tech-heavy 617bhp Chinese electric limo will take on the BMW i7 as the brand's third model in the UK.



SMART #5

On sale June
Brand's largest and most potent car yet will be launched with 348 miles of range and 637bhp.

SUBARU FORESTER

On sale April
Fresh exterior, lightly swept interior. Petrol 4x4 will be one of just a few ICE cars to sit alongside a new EV line-up.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

TESLA 'MODEL 2'

On sale December
Long-mooted affordable car is still up in the air, but the business case remains. Watch this space (again).

AUTOCAR IMAGE

TESLA MODEL 3

On sale August
CEO Elon Musk keeps hinting at a vastly more affordable Model 3. Plastic bumpers and steelies, anyone?

A huge year for hybrids

From £25k hatchback to £850k hypercar, here are 2025's big new hybrid stars

Aston Martin Valhalla

ON SALE OCTOBER

With its front-engined sports cars freshened up and fighting fit, Aston is now turning its attention to launching a mid-engined hypercar to rival the Ferrari SF90 XX and Lamborghini Revuelto. Equipped with an electrified version of AMG's flat-plane-crank V8, it puts out 1064bhp and should sound pretty biblical – but has a relatively plush cabin and enough EV range for silent running through town. A Valkyrie you can take to the shops, then.

Volvo XC90

ON SALE FEBRUARY

Electric EX90 inspires a design and tech overhaul for the school-run king, as Volvo steps back from its plan to ditch all ICE cars.

Ferrari F80

ON SALE OCTOBER

F40, F50, Enzo, LaFerrari… and now this: a 1184bhp hyper-hybrid with a proper Formula 1-derived V6 and three electric motors. Enjoy, Lewis.

HYBRIDS: NEXT BIG THING… AGAIN

We've been here before, haven't we: electrified combustion engines called in to bridge the gap to pure-battery power? It all feels very 2014.

But with the growth in organic market demand for EVs tailing off, many manufacturers – Audi, BMW, JLR, Volkswagen and Volvo to name but a few – are once again investing in new hybrid powertrains across their line-ups in a bid to reduce their emissions outputs while shoring up sales figures as buyers' doubts around the utility, affordability and longevity of EVs persist.

For some marques, a hybrid is a plug-in crossover with 62 miles of EV range and a piddly CO_2 output on paper; for others, it's a 1000bhp-plus hypercar with an electric motor bolstering the lofty reserves of a mammoth petrol engine. Both types have their merits.

FELIX PAGE

TESLA MODEL Y

On sale August

Europe's best-selling EV is set for tweaked styling and improved efficiency, which won't dent its popularity.

TOYOTA BZ3X

On sale November

Rakish small crossover will be effectively an electric C-HR equivalent but related technically to the bZ4X.

TOYOTA GR COROLLA

On sale August

Volkswagen Golf R rival packs 300bhp and 4WD and could fill a gap in the line-up when the GR86 retires.

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER

On sale January

Japan's Defender is as fabulous as ever off road and now better on it as well.

TOYOTA SPORT CROSSOVER

On sale October

This SUV/saloon/coupé marks Toyota's push into more premium EV territory.

Tester's highlight

DACIA BIGSTER

You have to move up the market to Porsche to find a brand with as sharp and focused positioning as Dacia – and everything I've read about the Bigster convinces me that Dacia's success in the B-segment with the likes of the Sandero and Duster can be replicated with the larger C-segment model. Before a wheel anywhere is turned, the Bigster is my tip for 2026 Car of the Year.

MARK TISSHAW

Dacia family hatchback

ON SALE NOVEMBER

We don't have a lot to go on here, but Dacia boss Denis Le Vot has confirmed that the Bigster follow-up will wear a totally new bodystyle and have a new name. A Golf-sized hatchback with characteristically chunky styling and an outdoorsy focus seems a safe bet, we reckon.

Porsche 911 Turbo

ON SALE MAY

The second electrified 911 variant will keep its flat six but gain a small electric motor for even more dazzling off-the-line performance.

Honda Prelude

ON SALE DECEMBER

Where did all the sporty front-drive coupés go? Their disappearance is a travesty, if you ask us. Honda clearly agrees and has turned the Civic into a rakish two-door with the promise of entertaining dynamics and an intriguing simulated gearbox. Is it too early to start begging for a Type R? Maybe an Si to keep us sweet… for now.

Alfa Romeo Stelvio

ON SALE NOVEMBER

One of the best-handling SUVs around is about to swap from Alfa's acclaimed Giorgio platform to a new modular structure called STLA Large, which will enable it to offer electric power for the first time while retaining a combustion option. Full details remain under wraps, but the new Dodge Charger, also on STLA, uses a 3.0-litre straight six encouragingly known as the 'Hurricane' motor.

VOLVO FLAGSHIPS GO ELECTRIC

VOLVO ES90

On sale November

For a while, it looked like Volvo was to become a maker exclusively of SUVs, so news of a revival for one of the market's most handsome saloons is welcome. The ES90 will be a sleeker, lower-slung sibling to the EX90 and is conceived as a rival to the likes of the BMW i5.

VOLVO EX90

On sale March

One of just a handful of electric seven-seaters, the EX90 is a tech trailblazer for Volvo. It arrives with dual-motor 4WD powertrains packing either 402bhp or 510bhp, plus a 111kWh battery for up to 374 miles of range. It also gets high-tech lidar kit that could eventually allow full self-driving.

TOYOTA SUPRA A90 FINAL EDITION

On sale August

Heated-up track special will send the straight-six coupé into retirement with a bang.

VAUXHALL MOKKA

On sale January

It doesn't look too different, but… Actually, no, it has barely changed. Slick new touchscreen, though.

VOLKSWAGEN T-ROC

On sale November

VW's bumpy road to electrification turns a crucial corner with the launch of its final new ICE car.

VOLKSWAGEN TAYRON

On sale April

Tiguan Allspace replacement is a seven-seat safe bet with a long-range PHEV option.

VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER

On sale March

VW sells three mid-sized vans on three platforms. This one's Transit-based.

NEW YEAR, N

NA74 SWF
GW-032-PG

EW WINNER

One of these will be named Car of the Year 2025 on Friday. COTY juror **MARK TISSHAW** and our road test editor swap notes to see how all seven stack up

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

The most exceptional new car released in the European market. That's the official line at the top of the Car of the Year statutes about what this great old award boils down to.

Sure, there have been the odd eyebrows raised about some winners during the past 61 years, but democracy does such things and, besides, a year and its winner can be only as good as the cars launched within those 12 months.

The cream still rises to the top, and the quality of the field in 2025 means this year's winner will be the kind of thick, moreish cream normally reserved for your Christmas pudding, not that red-labelled single stuff you're only punishing yourself with during the January Blues. To put it another way: our winner will be more 1999 Ford Focus than 1996 Fiat Bravo.

The 2025 Car of the Year (COTY) will be revealed on 10 January at the Brussels motor show, but the build-up started even before the Renault Scenic was crowned 2024 winner at the final running of the Geneva show last February.

For the first round of judging, jurors simply pick their favourite seven cars from all those launched in 2024. They must be all-new models only, so no facelifts, derivatives or different bodystyles, and they must be available to order with finalised pricing by 31 December. That creates a longlist of 42 cars. From those, the seven cars with the most votes from 60 jurors in 23 countries make it to the shortlist. These seven are then subject to a fresh round of voting from the same jurors before a winner emerges.

The seven cars – well, eight, more on which in a moment – shortlisted for COTY 2025 were assembled outside the Silverstone Museum on a windy day just before Christmas for the six UK jurors to test on the grimy, greasy, rutted, potholed roads nearby we know so well.

The best cars have always been able to excel on these roads, although these seven are not the exact seven shortlisted by Autocar editor and COTY juror Mark Tisshaw in consultation with the road test team, headed by road test editor Matt Saunders, who also joined proceedings at Silverstone. However, four of the five cars we really wanted on the COTY shortlist made the cut.

Those four are the Citroën C3, Dacia Duster, Kia EV3 and Renault 5. The fifth, which sadly didn't make it on to the COTY shortlist, is the Skoda Superb. The Polestar 3 and Mini Cooper completed our seven. But when all the COTY jurors' votes were counted, the C3, Duster, EV3 and 5 were joined by the Hyundai Inster, Cupra Terramar and Alfa Romeo Junior.

MARK TISSHAW It's my third cycle as Autocar's COTY representative and it feels like the mean, median and mode car tested in that time is a 4.6m-long electric crossover weighing close to two tonnes, having around 200bhp and a range of 270 miles, created by a mainstream European car maker and with about six different models from other brands related to it. These have made up the majority of shortlists too. But not this year.

MATT SAUNDERS No. Encouragingly, we seem to have quite an appealing selection. And with at least three of the seven cars being fully paid-up superminis, it looks to me like the first proper, European-flavoured COTY shortlist in some considerable time. That's because zero-emissions powertrain tech has finally become

Renault 5's cabin punches some way above its price point

Alfa's driver-centric cabin layout appeals but some trim doesn't

Alpine A290 is here because it's a sporty variant of Renault's 5

A290 shows there is a future for hot hatches in the electric era

Silverstone
Santander
GZ-913-EY
RX74 GDZ

> *"There's a real richness and charm to the Renault 5 that so many sub-£30k EVs won't be able to live with"*

affordable enough to be viable on small cars at small-car prices. Good news.

Predictably, we've got a few big-selling mid-sized SUVs and small crossovers as well. I'd have liked at least one genuinely big car, and something higher-end as well. The Polestar 3 would have covered off both considerations and I think it was deserving. Either Skoda's Kodiaq or Superb would have been well worth a place too.

Still, at least there's nothing dull or unappealing. Even the worthiest car here, the Duster – for all its dedication to versatile function – has at least a hint of design star quality about it. Though not nearly as much, admittedly, as the contender from its sibling brand…

MT Yes, from the outside the Renault 5 would appear to start as the favourite. The hype has never really died down since it was first revealed almost four years ago and, if anything, it's only grown since we finally got to drive it last autumn.

The 5 majors on comfort and refinement, and these qualities translate well on UK roads. Like the very best small cars, it doesn't feel small. The looks are backed up by the way it drives, and at just under £23,000 it's little more money than a hybrid Clio. Hard to find a weakness.

MS I'm not sure there is one – certainly not a serious one. We've seen it so many times at shows and in photos that you expect to almost look straight past the exterior in the metal, which, of course, you haven't got a hope of doing. This is a perfectly proportioned, brilliantly wrought, super-desirable bit of product design – and that only fully hits you when you see it in the metal and in proper context.

The thing I hadn't managed to do was take in the interior and that, predictably perhaps, has left the biggest impression on me. There's a real richness and charm to it, which so many sub-£30k EVs just won't be able to live with.

The rational case for it stacks up. It looks like you would get 200 miles of real-world range from the 52kWh model. And then there's performance that's strong enough to feel nicely assertive; Renault-typical notes of slickness, suppleness and dexterity to the steering, ride and handling; plenty of small-car agility about the chassis' enthusiasm for bends; and big-car comfort and damping sophistication too.

Has there ever been a more convincing reason not to buy an electric Mini than this? I'd say absolutely not. This is a really good car. But what's that Alpine doing here with it? ▸

“The C3 is a wonderfully unfussy, informal car. It’s simple to drive, comfortable and characterful”

◂ **MT** COTY rules preclude derivatives gaining a nomination in subsequent years, yet when such derivatives are launched in the same year, they can count on the same ticket. So while the Alpine may wear a different badge and be the car that takes its maker beyond a single, A110 model into a fully fledged brand with a range of cars, 10 years ago we would still have been calling the A290 a Renault Sport version of the 5.

MS I’m still tempted to. We’ve had the advantage of parking it side by side with its Renault sibling car, of course, and driving them back to back – and other road testers haven’t. And I like it a lot. There’s some real dynamic vivacity and attitude about it, plenty of naughty-feeling pace, and moments of true excitement to be enjoyed.

So I’m delighted it’s been included one way or another. But I’m happier still that the Renault gets lead billing. Because to me, when the dust has settled on your fifth fast dash down that country lane in the A290 and you’ve wiped the smile off your face, there’s still just a bit of doubt that it’s a proper driver’s car and a lingering question over whether it’s really extending very far what the 5 can do. It’s still missing a dimension on simple driver engagement somehow, despite the pretty cheesy and impotent ‘overboost’ button on the steering wheel.

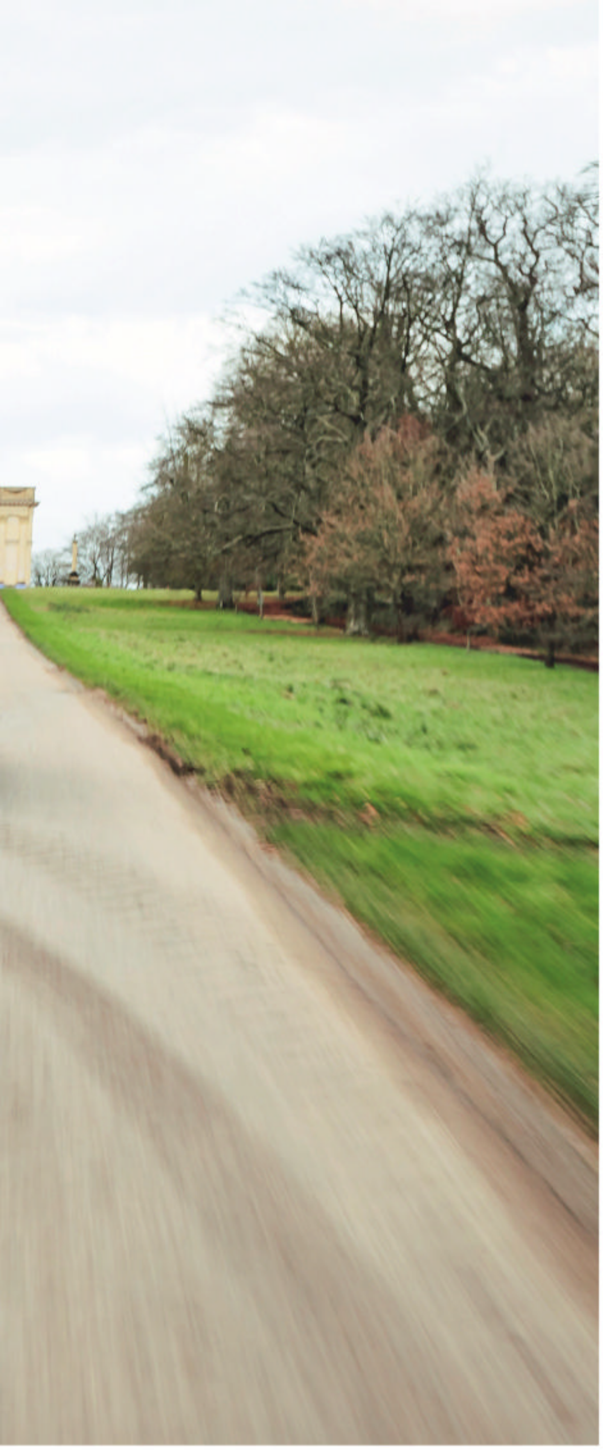
MT I think the 5 is a better road car than the A290 most of the time, as well as being cheaper, no less desirable and with a better range. Yet I’m glad the A290 is here and is getting the coverage off the COTY coat-tails of the 5, because it’s another welcome development of the electric hot hatch – the type of car we really want to prosper and thrive as they would feel the most missed of all.

MS Hear, hear. For similar reasons, part of me is glad that the Alfa Romeo Junior is here, though I suspect its inclusion has as much to do with sentiment as anything else. It’s Alfa’s first full EV; it’s available in a Veloce version that seems to have some Alfa-typical sporting purpose; and it certainly looks like it means business, if only by compact SUV standards.

But, unlike the A290, all the Junior Veloce really shows on bumpy UK roads is how hard it is to make a dynamic success of a car like this.

MT I couldn’t get on with it; that telling inability to find any kind of traction on these roads. Who’s asking for a car like this? Something with a fast-

Kia EV3 moves the game on in every way from the Niro EV



car-firm ride but all that restless body movement, and surface and traction sensitivity? Not me.

Perhaps the Veloce's just a bit of a sideshow and the standard Junior is the car we should focus on, but even that car feels a little feeble. Ultimately, there aren't many meaningful differences between the Junior and its platform twin, the Jeep Avenger, which was Car of the Year in 2022.

That might leave you scratching your head about why one can win so recently and one can be so off the pace, but that's progress in this market. The Alfa has stood still, while the game has moved forward.

Here's the best example: the Avenger was a finalist in the same year as the Kia Niro EV, a car that has already got a de facto replacement in the Kia EV3 that's better everywhere and cheaper.

MS It's so easy to be convinced by that Kia, isn't it? The size of it, the space it affords, the usual Kia cabin solidity and nearly 300 miles of usable electric range for under £40k. It's one for that crowd of people who have been looking on at the EV market, arms folded and tutting, for so long. It has undeniable rational qualities.

To drive, I found it like the car we road tested in our 31 December 2024 issue: competent and comfortable enough, but with hints of softness and dullness to its handling and nannyishness about its ADAS that might take the edge off the everyday ownership appeal for an interested driver. But honestly, most people I know wouldn't notice or just wouldn't care. They would be too busy feeling smug about what a 'proper' little family car they had chosen.

MT The EV3 has the best interior here, and if I were to pick one car in this field to do 20,000 miles in over the next 12 months, the EV3 would be it. It feels very well suited to both British roads and everyday life, as it's such a nice size and has excellent usability.

It lacks a bit of panache and 'wow' factor in the way it drives and its ADAS is annoying, but ultimately it's a great example of the rapid rate of progress in everyday EVs and its presence makes others look so far off the pace.

MS Speaking of progress, there's the Dacia Duster. It's a simpler and more direct sort of progress than the kind made by the Renault and Kia, granted. But there's something to celebrate about the endurance, in western Europe, of a car as versatile, functional, well rounded, well priced and to the point as this. And I'm delighted that COTY is celebrating it and seeing the bigger picture behind its Euro NCAP results.

MT I'm blown away by just how much better it is than the old one in almost every department, in ways that appeal to both the heart and the head, and how little Dacia asks of you in return.

If Renault has made killer progress with one model in the 5, Dacia has done it over a whole model range for a longer period of time. Already, I can't wait to see Dacia go into the class above for the first time in 2025 with the Bigster, the Duster's big sibling.

MS It amazes me how complete a modern car this has become. Fifteen years ago, motoring journos were in love with the idea of a car as cheap and useful as the Duster was, but I bet few would have actually chosen to live with one. Now, I'm genuinely tempted – because Dacia has taken almost every vestige of austerity away. It drives well, looks good, offers so much and would do everything you could ask of it and more. ▶

Citroën could learn something from Dacia (see right)

Duster shows Dacia's ability to create cheap cars that don't feel it

EV3 provides the best interior of all here but is a little dull to drive

◂ **MT** I kind of knew the Duster would be good because Dacia just doesn't make mistakes, but my hopes weren't as high for the Citroën C3, here in both electric and petrol versions. Even in the seven months since it was first launched, the design has dated and the proportions and some of the materials just make it look and feel cheap in a way that the Dacia doesn't. But still, I liked it and it was the surprise of the field.

MS I feel like Citroën's on strong form – perhaps the most consistent I've ever known it to have. It has learned not to be afraid to take an alternative tack, especially when it leads to something that combines the distinctive with the pragmatic.

Which is what the C3 does, it seems to me. It's a wonderfully unfussy, informal car. It's simple to drive, comfortable and characterful, usable and cheery. No landmark – but a deserving car.

If a combustion-engined one is £5k less than an ë-C3, I do wonder if the EV might be quite a tough sell, though...

MT It feels like a car from a generation ago in the simplicity with which it drives, yet with a more modern interior. Within Stellantis, Citroën is making the cars that feel the most meaningfully different from other brands with the same running gear. If it could now just crack the Dacia code of being cheap without feeling cheap...

MS We're well used to the MQB platform running gear beneath the Cupra Terramar and, to me, the Spanish brand's usual salad dressing can do only so much. But it's a safe bet – the kind of car that the continent continues to buy, done with just a little dose of special seasoning. There are a lot of Formentor buyers out there who will need something new to migrate to, and if you had offered them another Cupra Ateca, they might well have upped sticks to a different brand.

So it's meat and potatoes with a splash of medium-spicy sauce: what you think you need, made more appealing than it might otherwise be. Bet you it sells.

MT Blindfold me and I couldn't tell this was a Cupra from another Volkswagen Group model based on the way it drives. But visually, it is different and I quite like where the brand is going. The Terramar isn't Cupra at its best – that's what happens when you get handed an Audi Q3 as your donor car. Yet I'd still rather have it over the Audi.

MS I know plenty of people who would be very happy with one, simply because it has that little bit of richness and desirability about it. Cupra will have to be bolder with other products in future, though. It can't afford to get used to putting sharper-looking clothes and some bronze trim on otherwise ordinary cars. That won't maintain its growth prospects. The Formentor felt like something bolder and Cupra needs another Formentor moment sooner rather than later, really.

MT Which leaves us a car I've been scratching my head about ever since I first drove it back in September on the other side of the world in Korea, and I continue to do so now. I just don't really get who the Hyundai Inster is aimed at: a city car that's longish-looking but very narrow, with cartoony styling on the outside and a button-rich interior backed up by lots of big-car technology. You can even fold all four seats flat to turn it into a bedroom on wheels.

MS This feels like a car created in one of those smartphone apps that puts a novelty talking animal head on you. It's quirky, but not quite cute – alternative for its own sake. I don't mind the Hello Kitty features, but I'd much prefer them on a car of better proportions, and with better-conceived packaging.

Small cars aren't easy. You can't just throw a load of disparate ideas up in the air and hope they arrange themselves. And people don't pay a premium for 'different' unless you give them a good reason.

MT My hunch is that in lieu of a small electric version of an i10 or i20, and with targets to hit around the mandated sales of electric cars, Hyundai decided to export the Inster and hope to steer a few people who have bought its small petrol cars into one instead. Replacing those petrol sales with EV ones is smart business in 2025.

But the Inster's biggest problem in attracting buyers from outside Hyundai's existing customer base has already been covered in this story: the Renault 5. The pair are near enough the same money, but the 5 is the better car, everywhere.

MS It's better than the Hyundai, Kia and Citroën, I'd say. It's so different from the Duster that it would be quite hard to take marks from one to give to the other. But it's good enough to make the Cupra and Alfa look like also-rans, in my view.

MT The Renault 5 is the class of the field. The more I think about it, the more the 5 feels like the successor to the Ford Fiesta in the electric era as the default small car choice. Even better than that, it closes the curtain finally on this era of EVs having to look different for the sake of it: it's not weird at all and is truly desirable. This could be Renault's BMW Mini moment.

But the Duster is not too far behind and is only a tug or two on the heartstrings from running the 5 really close. As for the final place on our podium, the Kia and the Citroën are closely matched for different reasons.

The Hyundai and Cupra have appeal in isolation but they both fall down in this company and in the context of the market. Neither of them is the most exceptional new car released in the European market. Nor can any credible case be made for the Alfa Romeo.

Our votes are ultimately just one 60th of those involved, yet the strength in depth on the 2025 Car of the Year shortlist means that the winner is likely to be remembered as a good one.

Veloce's dynamics feel compromised on pockmarked B-roads

"It feels like a car created in one of those apps that puts a novelty talking animal head on you"

Inster offers lots of tech but also user-friendly buttons

Terramar's cabin materials come across as high quality

WHY THIS SHORTLIST BREEDS OPTIMISM

Are you ready for a shot of new year optimism? So was I at the end of last year, and it came with perfect timing in the form of an invitation to join the UK's six COTY jurors for their annual finalists' face-off at Silverstone.

It's a decade since I retired from the jury after 20-odd years, replaced first by our Matt Prior and now Mark Tisshaw. The aims of the competition have hardly changed: to choose one winner, and studiously avoid adding a bunch of confusing 'Car with the shiniest hubcaps' also-ran categories. Driving for the first time in ages on that familiar patchwork of roads near the famous circuit showed me how cars have changed, very much for the better.

First, the cars themselves. They were affordable – several of them in the first wave of small EVs the non-Chinese industry will use to defend its traditional markets. I have nothing against Chinese entrants, let me say, but I'm dead against the idea of a tsunami of cheap, competent, anonymous models so overwhelming that it cripples the European industry and sweeps away our freedom to choose interesting, disparate, familiarly branded modern cars made near home.

Thankfully, this was not another collection of 4.4m-long family SUVs, as we've seen in recent years. Here was the new Renault 5, Europe's excellent fightback flagship, with the joyously capable and comfortable Citroën C3 right beside it. The new Duster was there too. The Hyundai made an interesting if pricey non-conformists' choice. Kia's EV3 was an appealing compact option. And the Cupra and Alfa strengthened Europe's case.

What impressed me was how well the Europeans coped with evil UK back roads, yet cruised with quiet composure on smooth ones. They looked good and were well made, well equipped and well priced. Here was my best reassurance yet – led by Renault, Citroën and Dacia – that budget Europeans will be able to compete with the Chinese, even before any tariffs. That made this a very good day.

STEVE CROPLEY

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

“In years to come, buyers might rue missing EV bargains such as this”

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 14,409**

PORSCHE TAYCAN

Can a brilliant EV also be a brilliant used buy? Here's what we learned

WHY WE RAN IT To find out if a cut-price approved used electric Porsche can match the richly satisfying ownership experience of a new one

There's still plenty of trepidation about buying used electric cars, most likely reflecting the fact that it's developing tech. People don't tend to like the unknown, and there are many scare stories about failing batteries and other issues. Which seems odd to me: most batteries are covered by extended warranties, EVs have fewer moving parts that can break and people often still buy old Alfa Romeos despite literal warning lights.

It has led to some sharply falling prices for used EVs, even those from premium brands known for rock-solid residuals, creating a feedback loop that makes buyers even more nervous. But I reckon that in years to come, buyers might rue missing some bargains – such as the Porsche Taycan Sport Turismo to which I've just waved a very sad goodbye.

It arrived on our fleet as a nearly year-old model with just under 10,000 miles on it, expertly checked and fettled on Porsche's approved used scheme. When new, it would have cost around £90,000 fully specced (the 93.4kWh Performance Battery Plus was a £4454 option; single-motor models got a 79kWh unit as standard), but it reached us valued at about £65,000. That's a ridiculous bargain for one of the best EVs on the market sporting one of the more desirable badges.

It was a pre-facelift Taycan in enviable spec: single motor, biggest battery, estate-esque Sport Turismo body, steel suspension, smart-but-not-showy Dolomite Silver paint. Rare is the EV of which my favourite version hasn't been that with the least power and the longest range, and 322bhp is plenty when it's as easy to access as in the Taycan.

The Taycan was among the first EVs that overcame the inherent extra weight and offered genuinely dynamic handling. As decades of 911s attest, Porsche's chassis and vehicle dynamics engineers really know their stuff, and that expertise was well applied here.

It gave the Taycan an incredible breadth: it's easy to drive around town, a refined long-distance cruiser and genuinely fun on a flowing road. It's big, but having the wheels pushed out to the corners and short overhangs helps. As does the view out the front, framed by those oh-so-Porsche wheel bulges.

It's a proper Porsche inside, too, with a nicely understated sporting opulence. Finished mostly in black, our car's was restrained and classy, and while there was the obligatory touchscreen, it retained plenty of neat analogue touches, such as the dashboard clock and the steering wheel's driving mode selector dial.

SECOND OPINION

With its plush interior, excellent comfort level and vast interior space, the Taycan made me feel like royalty. It doesn't suit every environment, though: while the Taycan will eat up motorway miles with ease, I often winced as I attempted to squeeze through London's width restrictors. **JW**

A family visit meant I made good use of the Sport Turismo's estatey body. Clearly we're not talking Skoda Superb levels of suitcase swallowing, but it was a useful uplift from the saloon (446 over 407 litres), even if the sculpted body meant using all of it took some effort.

It took us where we wanted to go with little or no range anxiety

Taycan Sport Turismo was big, at 4963mm long, with plenty of luggage space

There was no doubting that an EV could be a proper Porsche

When I needed to cart my mum, niece and nephew to Heathrow airport and saw the pile of bags, I wished I'd borrowed the BMW i5 Touring that Matt Prior was running, but with some effort everything fitted in. The revelation was the Taycan's 84-litre frunk, which gobbled up more stuff than its dimensions would suggest.

One area where our Taycan did show its age a bit was its range and efficiency. The official range of 304 miles was essentially 250 miles in the real world. And despite my best efforts, I seldom reached 3mpkWh economy. Generally I class 300 miles as the minimum needed to make an EV truly everyday-usable (depending on your mileage and charging set-up, of course), which sounds disqualifying, but it rarely proved much of an issue in practice.

That was in part because the Taycan was so nice to drive that having to plug it in a bit more often was a sacrifice that I was willing to make. But it was also because the efficiency was generally consistent, so the predicted range was accurate, which gave me the confidence to forego contingency charging and use more of the given range.

It helped that the Taycan could charge at up to 270kW on the right charger, greatly reducing waiting times. And with my membership of the Porsche Charging Network, some of those fast chargers were more affordable than you think.

But after all that appreciation, what about the depreciation? Well, there's actually not a huge amount to report. The Taycan left with an extra 5000 miles and several months older (granted, a relatively short time), but that wasn't enough to notably wipe off much value. That makes sense: as with an ICE car, the big whack often comes in the first year or so, so buy a nearly new car and someone else has taken the hit.

One reason for pause when considering a used EV is that the tech is evolving so fast that your purchase might soon seem dated. Indeed, our Taycan arrived just as the model was given a far more significant upgrade than its light exterior modifications suggested. The new car offers substantially more range and better efficiency – enough to remove those few range compromises I mentioned earlier.

I would still take 'my' Taycan over many newer EVs that you could buy at this price point. It's everything that's good about Porsche combined with everything that's good about EVs, at a better bargain price than anything knocking around in the January sales.

JAMES ATTWOOD

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
james.attwood@haymarket.com

TEST DATA

PORSCHE TAYCAN SPORT TURISMO

MILEAGE

At start 9739
At end 14,409

PRICES

List price new £80,200
List price now £87,300 (updated model)
Price as tested £90,438

OPTIONS

Performance Battery Plus £4454, 20in Turbo Aero Wheels £1676, Sport Chrono Package £875, Dolomite Silver Metallic paint £852, park assist £575, 4+1 seats £371, ambient lighting £329, Driver Memory Package £282, gloss black side window trims £269, electric folding mirrors £231

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed range 304 miles
Battery 93.4/83.7kWh (total/usable)
Test average 2.7mpkWh
Test best 3.1mpkWh
Test worst 2.4mpkWh
Real-world range 245 miles
Max charge rate 270kW

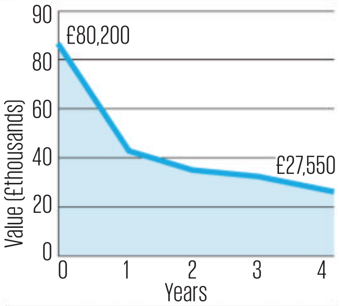
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 5.4sec
Top speed 143mph
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Max power 402bhp (with launch control)
Max torque 254lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear
Boot 446 litres (plus 84-litre frunk)
Wheels 9.0Jx20in (f), 11.0Jx20in (r), alloy
Tyres 245/45 R20 (f), 285/40 R20 (r)
Kerb weight 2080kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £1189 pcm (updated model)
CO_2 0g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Fuel costs £414.96
Running costs including fuel £414.96
Cost per mile 9 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

31 Jul 2024, 14 Aug, 28 Aug, 11 Sep, 25 Sep, 16 Oct, 23 Oct, 6 Nov, 20 Nov

LOVE IT

DYNAMIC DRIVE

To drive it's a Porsche first, an EV second. Plenty of power, expertly weighted steering, genuine poise.

SUPER-REFINED

Activate the cruise control on a long motorway schlep and the car is almost absurdly quiet.

PORSCHE'S VIRTUAL CHARGING NETWORK

This gave me access to ultra-fast charging at a discounted rate, and the real-time charging data in the sat-nav was so good that I forewent Google Maps.

SURPRISINGLY SPACIOUS

There's actually quite a lot of storage space inside, including the ability to stuff all that junk inside your frunk.

LOATHE IT

JUST FALLING SHORT

I was happy to live with the car's real-world range, but an extra 50 or so miles would have made it that much more usable.

FIRST REPORT

LEXUS RX

How will PHEV tech affect this brew of comfort, luxury and practicality?

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT
To find out if the original hybrid luxury SUV is still the best

This car has a bit of an identity crisis.

Ever since Toyota's luxury brand launched its Radiant Crossover (yes, really) in 1998, the Lexus RX range has stood for one thing above all else: luxury. Yes, they went uncommonly well, and yes, they could probably get you home if the Glyndebourne car park got particularly muddy, but the main draw of these limousines on stilts was always comfort and opulence, rather than driver appeal or off-road ability.

That was only enhanced from 2005, when the RX became the first hybrid large SUV, offering the silence of electric motivation running hand in hand with its free-spinning petrol V6.

When specified, as here, with the new F Sport Design trim, however, this new fifth-generation RX has real attitude, its aggressive addenda and 21in rims suggesting something a bit racier than the Lexus norm.

Drive it only a little way, though, and it's reassuring to learn that the key strengths of the old RX are alive and well. Unlike the 500h version that we put through the road test treatment in 2023, which features a six-speed automatic gearbox and torque-vectoring gubbins to try to give the RX a sportier drive, this 450h+ sticks with the e-CVT of old. Now, I'm no fan of CVTs in general, but here it works very well, largely thanks to the large battery pack and powerful electric motor, which masks any torque gaps.

But this car does stray from the old RX in two very important ways. First, the long-serving (and thirsty) 3.5-litre V6 has at last been ditched in favour of a more frugal 2.5-litre four; and second, unlike the conventional 350h hybrid (which is now the entry point to a three-model range), this new 450h+ is the first plug-in hybrid RX, with an 18.1kWh lithium ion battery offering a claimed 42 miles of electric-only range. It also results in a serious slug of performance, with a large front and smaller rear electric motor boosting the 182bhp available from the petrol engine alone to a 304bhp total. That means 0-62mph in 6.5sec (compared with 7.9sec for the regular hybrid) and a 124mph maximum. Not bad for a car weighing a little over 2.1 tonnes.

The PHEV is certainly having an effect: in 2023, the RX had its biggest-ever sales performance in Europe, a market traditionally more resistant to the charms of this unashamedly US-focused SUV, with a large part of that success thanks to sales of this particular model.

Lexus likes to claim that the RX

We would prefer the standard 19in wheels to these ride-hampering 21s

Neither a tall man nor a tall tree will trouble this SUV

It does handle neatly, but don't take the F-Sport package at face value

Touchscreen is now more prominent, having absorbed some climate controls

"It soothes and cossets in a way that few others can"

was the world's first luxury SUV. I suspect a couple of rather large names from the UK (Range Rover) and the US (Jeep Wagoneer) might have something to say about that, but it was certainly the first to use monocoque construction to give truly car-like refinement and road manners – and those qualities remain.

The 21in wheels of my test car's F-Sport Design trim introduce a certain amount of bump-thump into the cabin, but overall refinement is excellent, the cocoon-like feel aided by door seals so thick that you have to really slam them shut and windows programmed to slow their climb as they near the top of the doorframe to avoid an aggressive change of air pressure as they close.

Only the slightly raucous nature of the four-cylinder engine spoils that impression, lacking the muscle and outright smoothness of the six-pot units of rivals such as BMW's X5 xDrive50e, which I greatly enjoyed running last year.

It's also outgunned on boot capacity by the X5 xDrive50e and Volvo XC90 T8, both of which additionally offer a seven-seater option, but at 461 litres (or 612 litres if filled to the roof), it's still pretty large, and usefully the PHEV RX gets the same amount of space as its hybrid siblings. Instead, the battery pack eats slightly into the fuel tank provision, which is 55 litres to the 65 litres offered by the 350h and 500h. Lexus presumably figured that the additional battery range would more than make up for that.

This car scores well as far as passengers are concerned. The 2850mm wheelbase is 60mm longer than the old RX's, meaning that rear occupants enjoy palatial comfort, however tall the driver.

It's similarly roomy up front, with a pleasingly driver-focused dashboard layout and beautiful interior quality augmented by soft-touch materials throughout.

And the generous specification leaves you wanting for very little: the only option that we chose was premium paint, in a particularly lustrous silver that sets off Lexus's 'Spindle' grille design.

Rather bluff nose aside, this is a good-looking car to my eyes, with the neatly resolved rear in particular a big step forward over the slightly ungainly old RX.

And it's made all the more handsome by the sharp F-Sport Design addenda, which brings us full circle, back to the subject of driver appeal.

This is a very large car, at nearly five metres long and a shade less than two metres wide, and on country lanes in particular it feels it, causing the odd sharp intake of breath as I dive into hedges to avoid getting intimate with oncoming traffic. Sporty it ain't.

Realistically, though, most of my time is spent either stuck in traffic or eating up motorway miles, and in both of these sets of circumstances, it offers a very different type of driver appeal, soothing and cosseting in a way few others can. So while 10% of the time I might pine for a touch of agility, for the remainder I'm very happy indeed.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

SECOND OPINION

One of those cars that you never think about, then you drive it and can't stop recommending it. So utterly easy to rub along with that you can't help but crack out the 'favourite slippers' cliché. Not an ounce of excitement to be had, but super-comfortable, surprisingly manoeuvrable and brilliantly efficient to boot. Like a Toyota Corolla that's bulked up and been to finishing school. **FP**

TEST DATA

LEXUS RX 450H+ F SPORT DESIGN

Price new £69,995 **Price as tested** £70,245 **Options** Sonic Platinum special metallic paint £250 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 256.8mpg (WLTP)

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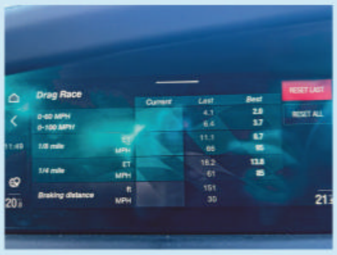
SNAPSHOTS



ALFA ROMEO GIULIA QUADRIFOGLIO

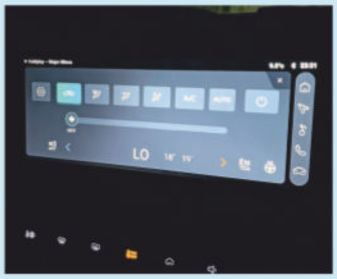
Mileage 9293 **Last seen** 31.12.24

Get your varifocals out and take a really good look at this. The QV has a helpful sub-menu in its infotainment system that logs data when it's set in drag race mode. It offers two datasets: last and best. And the best times that this car has on it are surely impossible: 0-60mph in 2.0sec and 0-100mph in 3.7sec! **MSc**

MINI COOPER

Mileage 2145 **Last seen** 31.12.24

I ignored an irritating rubbing from the driver's B-pillar for as long as I could, but it was exacerbated by my local area's horrendous roads to such a degree that I started to dread my commute. Several roadside repair attempts later, I admitted defeat and called in the heavies. With the loose window seals now sorted after a quick fix at BMW UK HQ, all I can hear is its revvy triple and I'm taking every chance to get back behind the wheel. **FP**



MG 3

Mileage 4894 **Last seen** 31.12.24

It's not just the forced distraction that makes me so opposed to touchscreen climate controls but also reliability concerns. Indeed, my MG recently claimed to be blowing on auto at 19deg C on the home page but, when I tapped into the climate menu, revealed that it was actually set to low, as suspected, and none of the icons would work. On a cold night, this glitch didn't go down too well with my passenger… **KC**

S OP 7699
Porsche Museum

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A
PORSCHE 911 GT3

A 911 MODERN MASTERPIECE THAT'S FINALLY COME OF AGE

The 991.2 GT3 has always been great but now its mad prices are history

The 911 GT3 released in 2017 is heralded as one of Porsche's greatest hits and it still quickens pulses and turns heads today.

So high was demand when it was new that you could not get your hands on a 991.2 (Porsche speak for the facelifted seventh-generation 911) GT3 for love nor money. Some buyers cashed in and immediately flipped their cars to make a profit, so many GT3s quickly reappeared on sale – but for around £50,000 to £70,000 more than their list price.

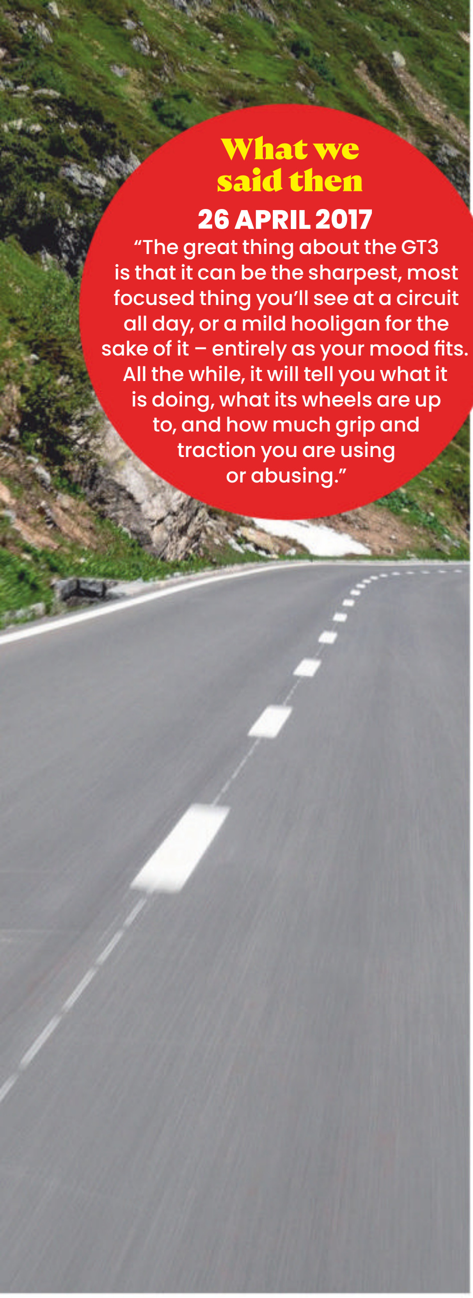
It's easy to see why demand outstripped supply: this sports car delivers unwavering grip, poise and balance, both on track and off it. But now that it has dropped in price to more accessible levels, is it time to invest in a GT3 before it becomes a modern classic?

Cast a cursory glance at this limbered-up 911 and you would be forgiven for mistaking it for its predecessor. A light nip and tuck to the front and rear bumpers are the only visual changes, but peel back the skin and you will see we are dealing with a very different beast.

Nestled in the shadow of that hulking rear wing is a 4.0-litre flat-six engine rather than a 3.8-litre one. The swap was made to address the reliability issue that plagued the pre-facelift '991.1' and it's a key reason why you should find the extra dosh for a post-2017 model. The 4.0-litre lump isn't just a carryover from the GT3 RS or spellbinding 911 R, either. It is a motorsport-derived 911 Cup car engine with new crankshaft, pistons, liners and bigger seals.

The bigger motor also ditches

Alcantara rim hints at its motorsport links. PDK or manual 'box? Both exist



What we said then

26 APRIL 2017

"The great thing about the GT3 is that it can be the sharpest, most focused thing you'll see at a circuit all day, or a mild hooligan for the sake of it – entirely as your mood fits. All the while, it will tell you what it is doing, what its wheels are up to, and how much grip and traction you are using or abusing."

its predecessor's hydraulic valve lifters, which, in combination with the other mods, means it can spin more freely – all the way to a screaming 9000rpm redline.

Peak power comes in at 8250rpm, so you have to work it quite hard, but how you get up there is your choice: you can have a snappy seven-speed PDK or a sensationally tactile six-speed manual gearbox.

The quicker acceleration on offer with the auto makes more sense if you're an avid track-day driver. But for the complete GT3 experience, it has to be the more engaging manual, which is also slightly lighter and gets a conventional limited-slip differential for an extra hit of playfulness.

Your choice of brakes also depends on your GT3's intended use: carbon-ceramics are best for road driving as they're lighter, but track cars should have steel items because they're cheaper to replace.

And if you don't want some of the car's racier cues, then you might wish to consider the more reserved Touring version, which features a GTS-style hidden rear spoiler instead of a fixed wing. Around 50 right-hand-drive Tourings made their way to the UK so they're exceptionally rare and command a hefty premium over the bewinged car. But if your heart is set on a Touring, performance car specialist Litchfield can convert a standard GT3 into one using Porsche-approved parts for just under £18,000 – a relative bargain considering the £200k you would have to fork out for a factory car.

The cabin of the GT3 is pure motorsport. Slide into the 918-style bucket seat of a car fitted with the Clubsport package (which also added a roll-cage, harness and fire extinguisher) and you are swaddled in carbonfibre and Alcantara trimmings. Tourings, meanwhile, are a little more luxurious, with mostly leather-trimmed elements and Comfort seats.

There are plenty of Clubsport models in the classifieds, but bear in mind that the cage takes up valuable luggage space, which you may want to use. Yes, the GT3 is the sort of sports car that you can drive to the Nürburgring and set a killer lap time, and then carry on to the south of France for a holiday without breaking a sweat.

SAM PHILLIPS

S OP 7699
PORSCHE

Aero reflects its ability as a track weapon but it is very road-friendly too

"This sports car delivers unwavering grip, poise and balance, both on track and off it"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

ROBIN TITTERINGTON

"After driving my friend's GT3 RS, I knew it was time to buy one myself. The RS was a bit over the top for me, so I bought a 991.2 GT3 with Comfort seats and carbon-ceramic brakes. It's a brilliant car and one that's better suited to 'normal' driving. My car's Michelin Pilot Cup 2 tyres generate a lot of noise so I intend to swap these for Pilot Sport 4s. For peace of mind, I bought an extended warranty, but I've had no issues so far. It's an exceptional car and I'd recommend it to any sports car enthusiast."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

The 4.0-litre is far more robust than the 3.8-litre unit, but there have been a few cases of engine failure, variously attributed to causes such as oil starvation or low cylinder compression. Porsche often covers engines under warranty, but be sure to check the service history.

■ GEARBOX

Issues with both the manual and PDK 'boxes are rare but make sure gearshifts are smooth because a replacement for either is obscenely expensive.

■ BRAKES

Be wary of cars fitted with carbon-ceramic brakes. Their stopping power is unrivalled but they can cost between £10k and £13k to replace. Make sure they're not worn or pitted.

■ TYRES

Check they're in good order, with no bald spots or uneven wear. Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 items are great for track use and Michelin Pilot 4S tyres are ideal for the road. A full set of both won't come cheap, mind.

■ BODY

Inspect the underside of the car for any scuffs and scrapes, especially if it has been used on the track.

■ INTERIOR

Full-carbon bucket seats are snug and secure but check that the hip bolster nearest the door hasn't been worn down by the previous owner getting in and out. The manual gearknob plastic can break and fall off, although you can easily source a replacement from Porsche or via an independent specialist.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

Not all GT3s have full-bucket seats. If you're after a more road-biased car, you'll have no trouble finding a GT3 with electric Comfort seats. Alternatively, there are carbon-backed Sport seats, which look superb and are reasonably comfortable.

The Clubsport package comes with a full roll-cage and a fire extinguisher, so it is worth considering if you plan to use your car for track days.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£117,000-£124,999

Mainly PDK cars with around 20,000 miles on the clock. Excellent condition but a higher number of previous owners.

£125,000-£134,999

Immaculate cars with low miles and appealing optional extras, such as the Clubsport package. Broad mix of colour options. More manual cars on offer too.

£135,000-£149,999

Newer examples with minimal mileage. Nearly new condition. Typically fitted with carbon-ceramics, Clubsport package, bucket seats. A full service history is a given here.

£150,000 AND ABOVE

Stunning, very low-mileage cars with lavish specs and, typically, a dealer service history. Touring versions more readily available.

ONE WE FOUND

PORSCHE 911 GT3, 2017, 13,000 MILES, £119,950

Race yellow paint, satin aluminium wheels, carbon-backed Sport seats and a manual gearbox. All the right options too, such as Clubsport pack, nose lift, LED headlights… Buy it before I do.

My car & I

A sporty Alfa bought not as described

Paul Carr's 1999 Alfa Romeo GTV 2.0 Twin Spark is looking good for its age. Well, it would if the top coat weren't crazing.

"I polish it and the roughness disappears, only for it to come back a few weeks later," says Paul.

At first glance, it's the only thing I can find to criticise about this pretty little coupé – yet when Paul first came across it in 2015, the seller described it so negatively that he turned it down flat.

"I'd always wanted another Alfa – as a young man, I'd owned two Alfasuds – and then one day my daughter called to say she had seen a GTV advertised in her local post office and that I should telephone the seller," he says.

Paul duly made the call – but rather than emphasising its good points, the car's owner trashed it.

"So I told him it wasn't for me but then thought my son-in-law and his brother, who owns a garage, might be interested in it," continues Paul.

They were and promptly bought the car, with 80,000 miles, for £400.

"My son-in-law ran it for a while, but his small grandchildren wouldn't go in the back," says Paul. "He asked me if I wanted it and, without thinking too hard, I said yes. In fact, it still had some faults, including with the dashboard

Our cars

My poor Panda's caught the winter bug

BY CHARLIE MARTIN

You may remember that I ended the first report on my Fiat Panda 100HP (18 September) contemplating a few upgrades. I'd been shopping for coilovers, lighter wheels and a cone air-filter kit, with the intention of kicking off a wider refurb of the whole car. All was groovy.

Then the weather took a turn for the worse and my brother wanted a lift home from the station late one evening. I rushed out, turned the key and – achoo! The Panda had caught a cold.

I'm told by fellow 100HP owners that the weird noise coming from under the bonnet is just a foible of the starter motor, as it doesn't much like chilly weather. That or it's on its way out, putting yet another bill on the horizon. Either way, it has sapped my confidence in the car.

I haven't driven the thing as much as I would have liked recently as there hasn't been a free day to get out of London on to a nice road, plus I'm nervous about a potential breakdown. That hasn't happened yet but I'm getting the sense that it's an inevitability.

I've postponed my upgrade plans until I decide what to do next. I have some free time coming up so the Panda has the next few weeks to convince me one way or the other.

Seasonal sniffles or a symptom of something rather more serious?

Busso 3.0 V6 is the dream GTV engine but a 2.0 Twin Spark can also delight

Today's car interior designers could learn a lot from this layout

> “The Twin Spark has proved to be more reliable than the 3.0-litre engine in my 60,000-mile BMW”

lights. Fortunately, an auto electrician traced the problem to a cracked circuit board, which he then resoldered.

“The most serious electrical problem with a GTV, however, is a risk of fire due to a faulty rear window. The heating element is on a time relay to protect the wiring but the relay fails and burns the fuse. Next thing, the car is on fire. It was one of the first things I put right!”

Since buying his car in 2015, Paul has done around 16,000 miles in his GTV – and enjoyed every one.

“It's lovely to drive and corners like it's on rails,” he says. “The [four-cylinder] Twin Spark is a fine engine and has proved to be more reliable than the 3.0-litre [straight six] in my 60,000-mile BMW, which has required new injectors, new coils and a new ECU.”

Thanks to its galvanised-steel body and assorted composite and plastic panels, his GTV is also free of rust.

Similarly, the interior shows no signs of wear.

Paul belongs to the Alfa Owners Club so is on top of the GTV's history: “My car is the Phase 2 version, introduced in 1998 with the redesigned dashboard. I particularly like the rotary controls.”

Obviously, he loves the GTV's exterior, too: “It was designed by Enrico Fumia of Pininfarina and then completed by the stylists at Centro Stile Alfa Romeo, who also designed the interior. They did a superb job.”

Walking around his GTV, I notice a small aftermarket addition: a Quadrifoglio badge.

Paul explains: “I like the story behind it. Alfa works driver Ugo Sivocci had never won a race and so, being superstitious, before his next one he painted a square with a four-leafed cloverleaf on his car – and he won! Unfortunately, some months later he was killed testing a car without his cloverleaf emblem on it. In his memory, Alfa removed one of the corners of the square to create a triangle, into which they set a four-leaf clover.”

It's hard to think of another marque that can touch the heart quite like Alfa Romeo.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

MURRAY SCULLION

2004 VOLKSWAGEN PHAETON V10 TDI

VS

JONATHAN BRYCE

2006 DODGE RAM 8.3 SRT-10

Brief: Find a bonkers V10-powered car for less than £30k

JB This Dodge is quite possibly the least appropriate 'car' for UK roads. It has an 8.3-litre petrol V10, rolls on chromed alloys and is even bigger than your Phaeton, which is itself one of VW's biggest-ever cars.

MS Pick-up trucks are conceptually deeply flawed. Imagine turning up for a first date in that! My VW is far more restrained and costs just £4000, so I have £26k to then buy another car.

JB You're going to have to spend £26k from day one rebuilding the entire thing, and while mine is £24k more, it has done 20,000 fewer miles, has a better service history and it's ULEZ-compliant. Yes, really.

MS VW's V10 TDI won International Engine of the Year, and it was the most powerful diesel car engine of its day. And this one has been taken care of by someone who has owned multiple Phaetons.

JB That is cool, I admit. But given the brief, are you going to choose a businessman's express over a paragon of overcompensation?

MS What's bonkers about mine is that it's an extraordinarily boring car that has one of the weirdest engines ever made. Yours is just bonkers with a bonkers engine.

JB I couldn't have written a better verdict line for the Dodge myself.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

BMW 323i
1996, 29,500 miles, £12,000
A prestigious badge, sharp styling, immaculate snowflake alloys: there's little about this Mystic Red 323i coupé to dislike. Quicker, smoother and almost as frugal as an E36 320i, with a partial service history and 12 months' MOT, it'll serve you well.

FIAT COUPE 2.0 TURBO
2000, 73,000 miles, £6500
Great to look at and in great nick too. It has been looked after by the same owner since 2000, with maintenance done by a Fiat specialist. A new heater controller and tacho wiring are needed but it's otherwise raring to go. A fresh MOT and partial service history are included.

FORD PROBE 2.5 V6
1997, 1000 miles, £13,995
This Probe is fresh out the box: there are just 1000 miles on the clock and the Sahara Gold paint and charcoal grey leather are immaculate. Kept in storage its whole life and recently treated to a cambelt service and MOT. Gutsy V6 is a likeable lump, too.

VAUXHALL CALIBRA 2.5i V6
1997, 152,000 miles, £5500
This highly appealing GT has been extensively restored, with a full respray, rebuilds for the engine and auto 'box and a new headliner. With a full service history and a long MOT, this rare V6 is an ideal summer cruiser.

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CIG81020	6.1 x 3 x 2.4m	140613572	£349.00		£418.80
CIG81220	6.1 x 3.7 x 2.5m	140613576	£389.00	£478.80	£466.80
CIG81224	7.3 x 3.7 x 2.5m	140613578	£489.00	£598.80	£586.80
CIG1432	9.7x4.3x3.65m	140613594	£1099.00		£1318.80
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Devil 7003	230V	3kW	010415450	£64.99	£77.99
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Devil 6009	400V	4.5-9kW	010416009	£119.98	£143.98
Devil 7009	400V	9kW	010415454	£147.99	£177.59
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IG3500AF	3400W	35	010617125	£359.00	£430.80
IG2200A*	2200W	26.6	010617121	£419.00	£502.80
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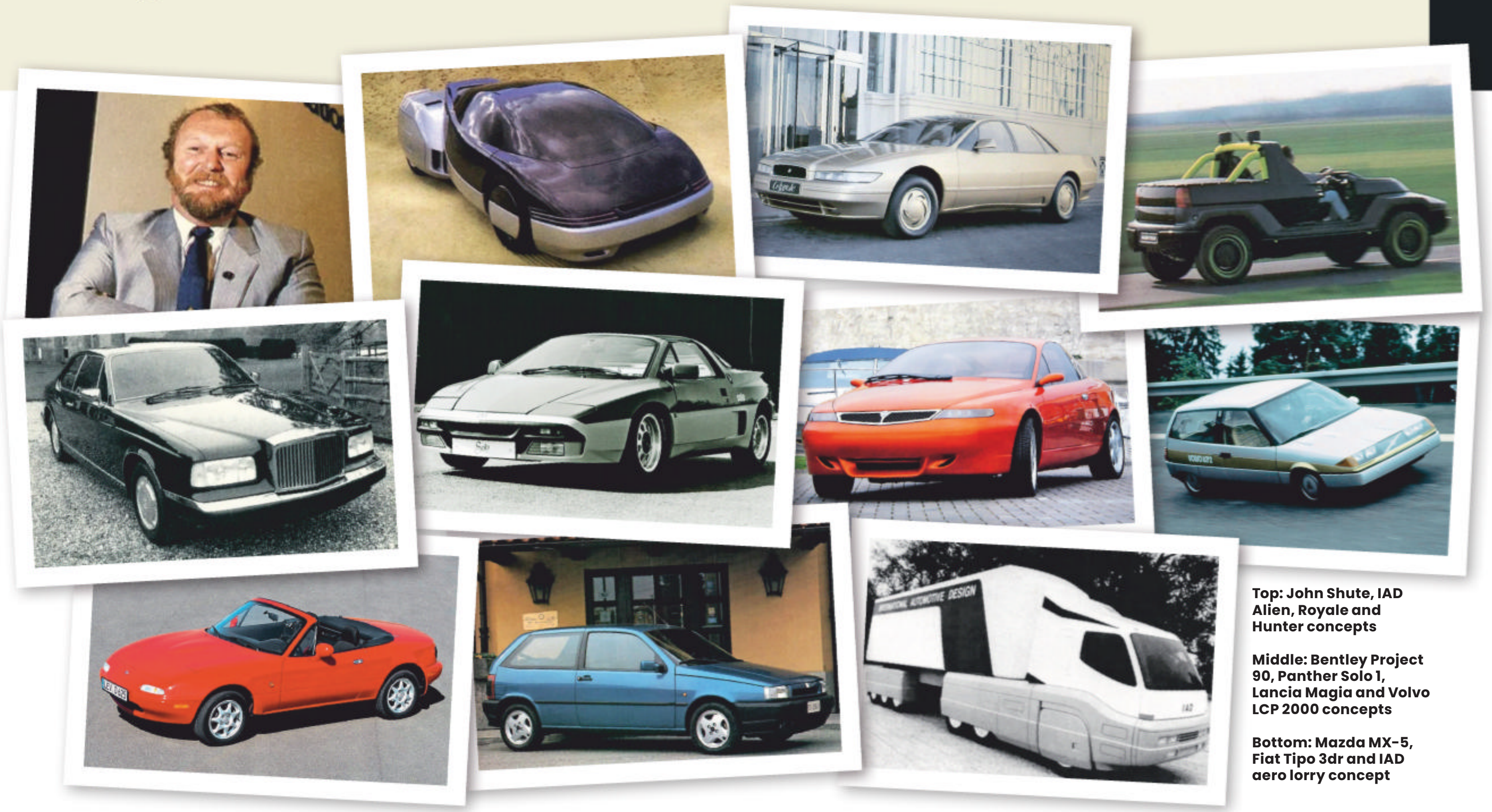
The Autocar Lost in the archive



Top: John Shute, IAD Alien, Royale and Hunter concepts

Middle: Bentley Project 90, Panther Solo 1, Lancia Magia and Volvo LCP 2000 concepts

Bottom: Mazda MX-5, Fiat Tipo 3dr and IAD aero lorry concept

The short but vibrant life of Britain's Pininfarina

Somewhere in the Sussex town of Worthing sits a grey business estate, the likes of which can be found anywhere in the country. Yet it was right here that many of the beloved cars and wild motor show concepts of the 1980s and 1990s were designed by a creative agency the equal of Italy's iconic carrozzerie.

International Automotive Design (IAD) was founded in 1976 by John Shute, who had been working as an engineer for General Motors' Holden division out in Australia.

His firm first came to Autocar's attention at the 1980 British motor show, where it displayed its idea for bringing Triumph's ageing TR7 sports car into the new era, and by which point it already had 160 staff.

Six years later, we headed down to the Worthing Technical Centre, IAD having turned over £13.5 million and proudly received the Queen's Award to Industry. It was already a global operation by then (and at its peak it would have offices in France, Germany, Spain, Japan and the US).

More than 37 big-name clients were on its books, including BMW, Ford, Land Rover, Lotus, Porsche, Saab and Volvo. It's just a real shame that, with a few exceptions, we still don't know exactly which of their icons IAD contributed to.

"Shute likes his clients to sleep easy and has devised a system that would be more at home in Fort Knox than a design studio," we explained. "Only those with a properly coded key card have access to a project. It means for the duration of that job, which could last for months or years, the people assigned to it are the only ones able to see it."

"That's the way it has to be," Shute told us, being "conscious that one slip could blow the whole business and stampede an already nervous collection of clients".

"The facilities available to clients are very wide," we continued. "IAD began by taking 'overflow' projects from the big manufacturers who were disinclined to hire specialist staff for certain short-term design tasks. Today the jobs are getting bigger, and to match those demands, IAD has constantly updated and uprated its facilities to the point where it can now tackle a complete design job, from first concept through to production engineering and testing of prototypes."

IAD had also started designing and exhibiting its own concepts, so as to "present a more public front to its hard-working and hard-selling background".

Notable among them was the Alien, unveiled at the 1986 Turin motor show, where it was "radical enough to draw some of the attention away from equally daring concepts" by Italdesign, Zagato and Pininfarina – Shute's own heroes – and "while expensive to do, paid for itself several times over in terms of interest and new business attracted directly by it".

We returned to Worthing in 1988, as IAD revealed the suave Royale saloon and fun Hunter off-roader, with its turnover soaring to £40m and it having been quality-approved by the Ministry of Defence.

"There is no one reason for IAD's success and continued expansion, though it has certainly been largely reliant on the imagination and vigour of its chairman," we said. "Shute himself believes it has been due in part to doing a quality job and maintaining a strong relationship with each client."

Probably the finest of the IAD projects from which secrecy was lifted was the original Mazda MX-5.

Sales and marketing boss Mike Goldsmith revealed: "In late 1984, Mazda's technical research centre commissioned IAD to carry out a concept engineering programme for the design and prototype build of a lightweight sports car.

"The [resulting] fully drivable and fully finished prototypes were driven by senior management. This resulted in tremendous enthusiasm for the project from all quarters, which culminated in it getting the green light for further development and eventual production.

"We like to think that it was our efforts five years ago which helped in some small way in the birth of what must be one of the world's best affordable sports cars."

In 1990, IAD doubled its workshop space so that it could also actually produce cars at "very low" scale, having agreed to work with Anglo-Swedish firm Clean Air Transport, which was creating a small electric car for the US city of Los Angeles – but this never came to fruition.

IAD went under in 1993, risking some 1000 jobs, amid a recession that hit the global automotive industry hard. Commercial vehicle maker Leyland Daf had crashed owing the firm £500k and Lancia hadn't adopted its proposal for a Dedra-based coupé, costing it £300k.

IAD was rescued by British engineering group Mayflower, but its Worthing base was sold to bullish Korean car maker Daewoo, the IAD name soon vanished and Mayflower itself went bust in 2003.

KRIS CULMER

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W2 OAD	£490
MO05 OCT	£290
DN09 OCT	£190
Y24 OCT	£290
OCZ 277	£190
BJ60 ODE	£390
WO05 ODY	£3530
J400 OES	£490
C13 OEY	£590
W66 OFF	£390
J555 OJB	£190
L6 OJP	£490
J17 OJT	£199
ST70 OLA	£390
JP14 OLD	£199
J999 OLF	£390
R12 OLL	£490
RO54 ONA	£490
RA57 ONV	£190
D1 OOW	£690
J1 OOW	£690
L1 OOW	£690
J88 OPA	£199
A10 OPB	£390
K1 OPM	£730
N3 ORA	£2940
JA11 ORD	£290
H19 ORD	£390
K4 ORF	£190
T355 ORO	£1300
K1 OSM	£890
V9 OTR	£390
E7 OTS	£590
M2 OUL	£290
V6 OUR	£390
ME11 OWC	£490
ME11 OWJ	£490
C4 OWL	£600
BU15 OWS	£290
M40 OXL	£199
OXZ 1067	£190
NB11 OYD	£690
Y111 OYD	£1600
D11 OYO	£490
K1 PAE	£690
DM07 PAM	£590
DM56 PAM	£590
0064 PAM	£390
PP15 PAR	£199
Y121 PAR	£290
LA10 PAT	£390
ST11 PAT	£590
BM51 PAT	£390
PD56 PAT	£490
940 PAT	£2400
X50 PAU	£290
V500 PAW	£390
W500 PAW	£390
PAW 635	£4800
PAZ 7428	£190
A13 PBM	£290
BE11 PCL	£290
F3 PDF	£390
S24 PDR	£290
R1 PDX	£390
333 PE	£8522
2880 PE	£2420
PIB 4455	£290
PJV 42	£2420
PR 6092	£4115
PW 653	£9700
RCZ 775	£790
8045 RF	£1600
574 RHY	£1580
RIL 4596	£190
RRN 712	£1300
SRZ 3056	£199
SUI 2867	£190
123 TC	£16592
TCE 4	£8522
TEZ 5172	£290
6165 TF	£1100
TJI 4854	£190
TNZ 3053	£290
TXI 667	£490
1000 UM	£2100
WLA 965	£1900
WSL 678	£1400
XIJ 508	£490
4956 XJ	£1600
XWN 999	£1080
YAS 339	£2000
YEZ 5542	£199
YSL 769	£1100
YWF 523	£990

ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of the independent, objective and empirical road testing of new cars is the longest in the world. But like everything that endures, our road testing process has always moved with the times.

Until recently, it was thought that our first instrumented road test report was published on an Austin Seven in April 1928, but fresh research has lately revealed that the tradition is older still.

For more than a century, these road tests have been verifying, describing and illustrating the performance and characteristics in close detail, one new car at a time. Driving impressions have always been a key component part of them, around which other elements have changed. In early years, these test elements included benchmarking of braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later they expanded to take in acceleration, top speed and stopping distance, as well as cruising noise level. Cabin dimensions and measured weight became included too.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated state of charge. All are key indicators of the integrity of vehicle engineering in this emerging era.

Some of our road tests also include lap-time performance benchmarks where appropriate, but all are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car - and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

ABARTH

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ 25.3.09 Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★½☆ 9.8.23 A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★½☆ 26.2.14 Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★½ 29.3.17 Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★½☆ 3.1.18 Spry-handling SUV is likeable, if short of the class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★½☆ 9.1.19 A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ 28.6.23 Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ 16.5.18 Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★½ 9.3.22 The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★½☆ 15.11.23 Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★ 9.10.19 Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★½ 18.9.24 Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ 21.11.18 Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
DBX ★★★★½ 28.10.20 Does everyday driver appeal better than any other super-SUV.	4.6	3.8	2328	24.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆ 30.11.22 A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★½☆ 2.10.19 Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★½☆ 18.11.20 Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
A4 2.0 TDI 190PS S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆ 4.11.15 An even smarter and better way to travel than before but still ordinary to drive.	8.4	7.3	1480	-	-
RS4 Avant ★★★★☆ 14.2.18 A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S4 TDI ★★★★☆ 18.9.19 Diesel power sparks an appealingly different identity for this fast Audi.	4.6	4.1	1871	54.3	-
S5 Quattro ★★★½☆ 11.1.17 Broad-batted sports coupé does everything but get its claws into you.	4.9	4.4	1615	33.2	-
A5 Sportback 2.0 TFSI 252PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★½☆ 8.3.17 Sleek mid-sized executive fastback is still short of a selling point beyond its style.	5.7	5.3	1535	41.1	-
A6 Avant 40 TDI S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆ 14.11.18 High-tech throwback is a timely reminder of what Audi does best.	8.4	7.5	1710	50.1	-
RS6 Avant Carbon Black ★★★★☆ 11.3.20 Bigger on luxury and usability than rawness or involvement.	3.3	2.8	2217	32.8	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 5.1.22 Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★½☆ 11.7.18 Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★½☆ 17.6.20 Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★½ 26.6.19 A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★½☆ 2.6.21 A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★½☆ 9.11.16 Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ 20.3.19 More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★½☆ 7.7.21 Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 2.0 TDI 190PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆ 15.3.17 Like the previous Q5 but with additional class, dynamism and polish.	8.3	8.5	1770	42.5	-
SQ5 TSI Quattro ★★★½☆ 21.6.17 Mid-sized performance SUV bites off more than it can chew.	5.5	5.0	1870	32.6	-
SQ5 Sportback TDI Quattro ★★★½☆ 3.8.22 Not the sharpest fast SUV, but the real-world appeal is clear to see.	5.1	4.6	2023	49.0	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★½☆ 2.10.24 EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	–	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 12.8.15 Chiselled, plush, suave and spacious. Only so-so to drive, though.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★½ 26.10.16 A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ 26.9.18 Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ 30.12.15 Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-

BENTLEY

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★½ 18.5.16 Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga Diesel ★★★★★ 5.4.17 Bentley's vision of the perfect SUV gets its missing piece.	5.2	4.6	2645	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ 24.4.24 Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT W12 First Edition ★★★★½ 2.5.18 Superb luxury coupé has added dynamism but not enough to top the class.	3.6	2.9	2295	26.4	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ 22.12.21 Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★½ 19.4.23 Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur W12	★★★★⯪	15.7.20	Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters.	3.9	3.2	2500	32.5	-
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner	★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

BMW

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M50i M Performance xDrive	★★★★☆	9.9.20	Stunningly large and enviably refined but too excessive for many.	4.8	3.9	2583	30.5	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport	★★★★⯪	2.3.22	Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 Touring	★★★★★	4.11.20	Working to an old-school recipe, Alpina turns the 3 Series into its magnum opus.	3.8	3.2	1880	37.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
C3 Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	28.12.16	Dynamically challenged, but a cheery design makes this supermini interesting.	9.6	9.4	1050	62.3	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-

DACIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Duster SCe 115 4x2 Comfort	★★★★☆	22.8.18	Comfortable, simple SUV keeps its budget family motoring star quality.	13.1	12.6	1286	42.2	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-

DALLARA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Stradale	★★★★⯪	16.10.19	Has esoteric appeal but is a product of passion and rare dynamism.	3.7	3.4	987	30.1	-

DS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Panda 1.2 Easy	★★★★⯪	25.4.12	Was everything a city car ought to be but is now way past its prime.	14.6	15.6	1020	49.1	-
Panda 4x4 Twinair	★★★★☆	17.4.13	A lovable four-wheel-drive miniature that trades space for style and charm.	14.6	15.8	1195	44.2	-
500 1.4 Lounge	★★★★☆	19.9.07	Enjoyable city car with the substance to back up its style.	10.3	10.4	1065	42.8	-

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500C 1.2 Pop ★★★★☆	5.8.09	Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.	13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-
500 Twinair Lounge ★★★⯪☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima ★★★⯪☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fiesta 1.0 Ecoboost 125PS Titanium ★★★★⯪	9.8.17	A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Fiesta ST ★★★★⯪	15.8.18	Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★⯪	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST ★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★⯪	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma ST ★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★⯪☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★⯪☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse ★★★⯪☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★⯪☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★⯪	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-
F-150 Lightning Platinum ★★★⯪☆	17.5.23	Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.	4.5	3.7	3121	-	288

GENESIS

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★⯪☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80 ★★★⯪☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★⯪☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM ORA

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★⯪☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance ★★★⯪☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★⯪☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT ★★★★⯪	25.10.17	Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★⯪☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★⯪☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N ★★★★⯪	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE ★★★⯪☆	13.9.17	Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance ★★★⯪☆	28.12.17	Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★⯪☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo ★★★⯪☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★⯪☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAGUAR

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★⯪	1.7.15	Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF 2.0d 180PS R-Sport ★★★★⯪	2.12.15	A more mature, better all-round prospect, with excellent dynamics.	9.4	9.0	1595	-	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★⯪☆	17.4.19	Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★⯪☆	11.4.18	Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★⯪	12.9.18	Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace 2.0d AWD R-Sport ★★★★☆	11.5.16	By and large, and engine apart, this is the Jaguar SUV that we hoped it would be.	9.2	9.7	1775	-	-
F-Pace SVR ★★★★⯪	24.7.19	Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯪	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type V8 S Convertible ★★★★☆	12.6.13	As good to drive as it is to behold – but at a material and financial cost.	4.0	3.4	1810	28.5	-
F-Type V6 S Coupé ★★★★⯪	11.6.14	Stunning looks and a sensation to drive but not quite unequalled.	4.9	4.2	1755	32.5	-
F-Type 2.0 R-Dynamic Coupé ★★★★☆	22.11.17	Plenty of driver appeal, but its cracking chassis merits a better engine.	5.7	5.1	1640	43.6	-
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆	29.4.20	The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

Model	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit ★★★⯪☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172

TOP 3

BEST SUVs

1 Range Rover Sport

2 BMW X5

3 Dacia Duster

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THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1986 TOYOTA CELICA 2.0 GT

Carina-based sports car makes the switch from rear- to front-wheel drive for its fourth generation, resulting in a clear improvement dynamically, and edges upmarket. A strong contender against the likes of the Audi Coupé and Ford Capri.

Price £12,250
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1998cc, petrol
Power 147bhp at 6400rpm
Torque 130lb ft at 4800rpm
Weight 1439kg
0-60mph 8.2sec
0-100mph 24.3sec
Top speed 133mph
Economy 25.0mpg

1969 SUNBEAM RAPIER H120

Sporty version of Sunbeam's Hillman Hunter-based fastback arrives to rival BMW 2002 coupé with tuned, twin-carb engine, higher gearing and overdrive. Has good performance but its handling and steering are disappointing and it's pricey.

Price £1644
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1725cc, petrol
Power 105bhp at 5200rpm
Torque 120lb ft at 4000rpm
Weight 1047kg
0-60mph 11.1sec
0-90mph 29.6sec
Top speed 106mph
Economy 21.9mpg

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Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★½☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★½☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	–	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport 2.2D HSE Luxury	★★★★☆	18.3.15	Practical, capable, desirable and, despite a few flaws, great to drive.	8.9	9.0	2081	-	-
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
LS 500h Premier	★★★☆☆	6.6.18	Limo has never been more appealing or less competitive in key areas.	5.9	5.3	2404	42.2	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★½☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★½	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★½	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★½	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★½☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★½	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★½	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★½☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★½☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 Sport	★★★★☆	4.7.18	Luxurious and desirable but not good enough to drive to take top spot.	8.7	7.9	1375	56.7	-
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★½	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★½☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★½	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	–	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 1.5 3Form Sport	★★★½☆	25.12.13	No slayer of the best mainstream giants but cheap done very cheerfully.	11.4	11.6	1240	41.4	-
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★½☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive	★★★½☆	25.11.20	MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS EV Exclusive	★★★☆☆	4.12.19	Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on.	8.9	8.0	1556	-	113

MINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★½☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★½☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★½☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★½	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★½☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★½☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★½☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40

TOP 3

BEST SPORTS CARS

1 Alpine A110

2 Porsche 911

3 Mazda MX-5

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line	★★★½☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line	★★★½☆	18.1.17	In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★½☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★½☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★½	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★½	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Cayman GTS	★★★★½	9.5.18	Outstanding in lots of ways but, so far, less Cayman may still be more.	4.8	3.6	1390	39.0	-
718 Spyder	★★★★½	1.4.20	Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 Carrera S	★★★★½	29.5.19	Faster, richer and more competent than the 991, if less vivacious.	3.4	2.8	1525	39.4	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★½	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★½	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★½	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
Macan Turbo	★★★★½	4.6.14	Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Cayenne S	★★★★½	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★½☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4S Diesel	★★★★★	1.2.17	A multi-talented sporting GT with an unmatched range of abilities.	4.1	3.8	2050	42.8	-
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★½	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

BEST SMALL SUVs

1 Dacia Duster

2 Nissan Qashqai

3 Volvo XC40

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★½	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
Mégane E-Tech Techno	★★★½☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★½☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★½☆	13.10.21	Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★½☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost	★★★★½	13.1.21	Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.	4.7	3.8	2490	28.5	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★½	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★½	19.7.17	Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★½☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.6 TDI Ecomotive SE	★★★★½	19.10.16	Former class leader for all the right reasons – desirability included.	10.5	10.3	1408	-	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★½	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★½☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI vRS	★★★★☆	17.2.21	Enduring fast diesel is better at a simmer than a rolling boil.	7.2	5.9	1441	69.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★½☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★½☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★½☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★½☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★½☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vitara 1.6 SZ5	★★★½☆	29.4.15	The Vitara is solidly built in Suzuki's image – and that's fine with us.	9.5	9.5	1124	-	-
SX4 S-Cross 1.6 DDiS SZ4	★★★½☆	30.10.13	Quietly capable in most respects and remarkable for its parsimony.	10.0	10.1	1305	67.5	-

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT
★★★★⯪ 7.4.21
Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.
6.4 5.8 1966 44.4 48

TESLA

Model 3 Standard Range Plus
★★★★☆ 4.9.19
Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.
5.8 4.7 1633 - 156

Model 3 Long Range ★★★★☆ 14.2.24
Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.
4.4 3.4 1846 - 277

Model Y Long Range AWD
★★★★☆ 23.3.22
A far better electric car than a premium SUV.
4.7 3.6 1978 - 234

Model S P90D ★★★★⯪ 20.4.16
Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.
3.5 3.0 2220 - 214

Model S Plaid ★★★⯪☆ 2.8.23
Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.
2.4 1.7 2220 - 301

Model X 90D ★★★★☆ 15.2.17
High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.
5.2 4.2 2508 - 147

TOYOTA

Aygo X Limited Edition ★★★⯪☆ 11.5.22
A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.
15.6 16.5 974 58.7 -

Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design ★★★★☆ 23.9.20
Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.
9.2 8.8 1140 65.0 -

GR Yaris Circuit Pack ★★★★★ 3.3.21
Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.
5.2 5.0 1283 39.2 -

Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports ★★★★☆ 5.6.19
A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.
8.5 7.7 1537 52.6 -

bZ4X AWD Vision ★★★⯪☆ 18.1.23
A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.
6.4 5.9 2023 - 208

Mirai Design Premium ★★★★☆ 16.6.21
Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.
8.7 8.3 1937 - -

GR Supra Pro ★★★★☆ 14.8.19
Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.
4.4 3.6 1495 39.0 -

Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport ★★★⯪☆ 1.3.23
Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.
10.0 9.5 2241 32.5 -

VAUXHALL

Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto ★★★⯪☆ 22.1.20
Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.
11.2 11.5 1171 51.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line
★★★⯪☆ 5.10.22
Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.
9.9 9.2 1304 55.3 -

Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite
★★★☆☆ 7.6.17
Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.
9.8 10.3 1278 54.2 -

Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto ★★★⯪☆ 12.5.21
The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.
9.3 9.1 1238 48.6 -

Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav
★★★☆☆ 22.4.20
Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.
- - 1800 - -

Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy
★★★⯪☆ 27.12.18
Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.
14.7 16.2 1552 60.1 -

VOLKSWAGEN

Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE ★★★★⯪ 31.1.18
Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.
10.7 11.2 1145 57.1 -

Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+ ★★★★☆ 1.8.18
A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.
6.7 5.9 1342 46.8 -

Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG
★★★★⯪ 22.7.20
Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.
8.3 7.8 1330 60.0 -

Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style
★★★★⯪ 23.10.24
New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.
7.2 6.1 1619 46.5 -

Golf GTI ★★★⯪☆ 25.9.24
'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.
5.3 4.4 – 47.2 -

Golf R ★★★★☆ 14.4.21
Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.
4.4 3.7 1520 43.9 -

ID 3 Pro Performance Life ★★★★☆ 31.3.21
Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.
7.0 6.5 1757 - 145

Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line
★★★⯪☆ 27.9.17
Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.
6.5 6.2 1866 55.6 -

Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake ★★★⯪☆ 9.6.21
Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.
7.1 6.0 1783 52.5 -

ID 7 Pro Match ★★★★⯪ 13.3.24
Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.
6.1 5.1 2162 - 239

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG
★★★★⯪ 24.1.18
Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.
6.7 6.5 1534 37.5 -

T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG
★★⯪☆☆ 10.6.20
It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.
- - 1540 - -

Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line
★★★⯪☆ 22.5.24
Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.
9.4 9.2 1606 44.9 -

ID 4 GTX Max ★★★⯪☆ 27.10.21
GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.
6.2 5.6 2220 - 200

Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech
★★★⯪☆ 8.8.18
An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.
7.2 6.6 2292 41.6 -

Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance ★★★⯪☆ 5.6.24
It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.
6.2 5.7 2446 34.1 26

Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG
★★★★☆ 3.2.16
A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.
9.9 9.7 1666 - -

Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style
★★★★☆ 8.3.23
Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.
8.4 7.1 2243 37.9 14

ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro ★★★★☆ 8.2.23
It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.
9.5 9.1 2498 - 185

Grand California 600 ★★★⯪☆ 2.1.20
Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.
15.8 16.7 3095 28.5 -

Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB ★★★☆☆ 30.3.22
Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.
9.1 9.0 2108 39.1 -

Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance
★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.
7.2 6.4 1836 44.5 73

VOLVO

EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus ★★★☆☆ 1.5.24
Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.
5.7 5.1 1779 - 179

C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate
★★★⯪☆ 13.4.22
A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.
4.4 3.6 2172 - 194

XC40 D4 AWD First Edition
★★★★⯪ 7.2.18
Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.
8.5 8.5 1735 43.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

XC60 D4 AWD R-Design
★★★⯪☆ 5.7.17
The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.
8.9 8.9 1836 48.9 -

XC90 D5 AWD Momentum
★★★★☆ 17.6.15
A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.
8.3 8.3 2076 - -

V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto
★★★★☆ 27.6.18
Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.
8.9 8.3 1669 43.1 -

V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design
★★★★⯪ 21.9.22
Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.
4.9 4.3 2036 38.0 51

V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design
★★★★⯪ 11.11.20
Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.
5.6 4.9 2109 41.9 -

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Renault 5 Turbo 2026
RWD super-hatch gets 500bhp from in-wheel electric motors.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

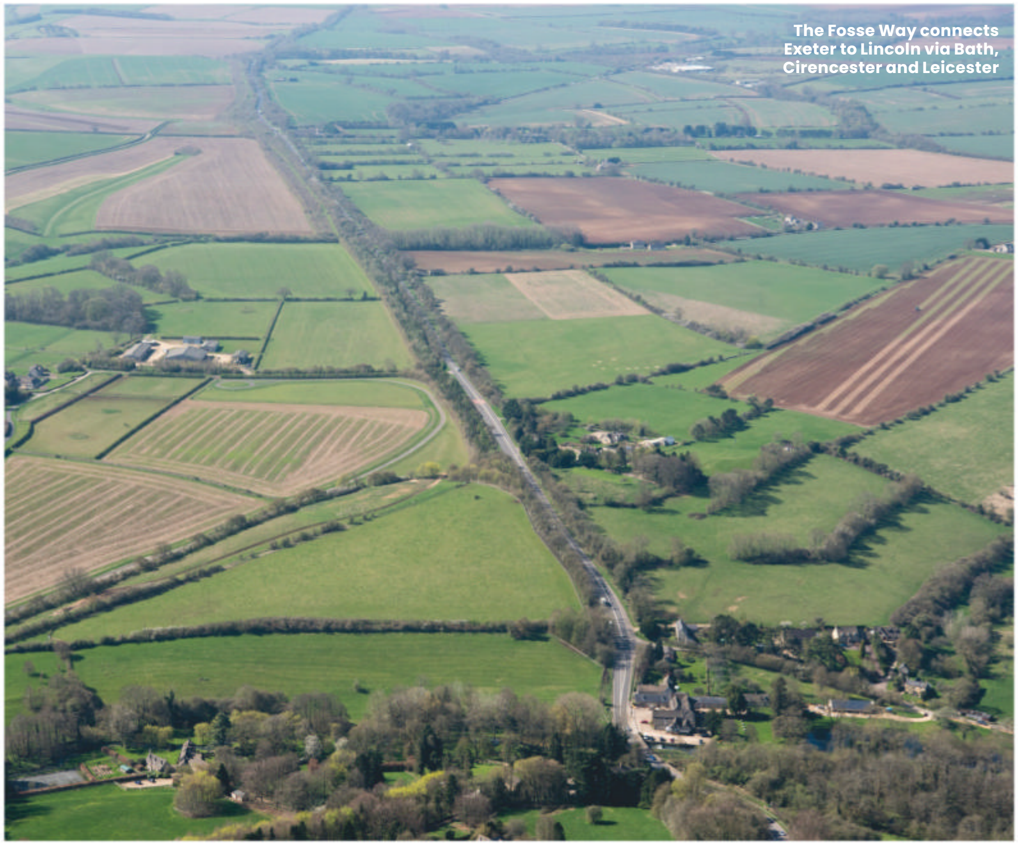
Mercedes-AMG GT SUV 2027
Porsche Cayenne Electric rival promises more than 1000bhp.

Seat Ibiza Spring
Fun supermini gets tweaked design and fuel-saving tech.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
THE FOSSE WAY

BY MATT SAUNDERS



The Fosse Way connects Exeter to Lincoln via Bath, Cirencester and Leicester

A little over 20 years ago, before speed cameras and carbon emissions and mandatory electronic reminder buzzers all began doing their best to change motoring enthusiasm profoundly for the worse, Honda commissioned some research into the UK's favourite driving roads. More than 2000 respondents nominated the likes of the A686 out of Penrith, the A69 across the Pennines and the Yorkshire Dales' Buttertubs Pass for a list that became known as 'The Tarmac Oscars'.

That survey, incidentally, would shortly thereafter inspire an Autocar supplement called 'The B-road Baftas', edited by yours truly, whose greatest legacy was probably the strongly worded letter of complaint that it attracted from lawyers representing the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. But anyway...

When Honda's survey results were reported, a 21-year-old me – still but an Autocar reader at the time, apoplectic of the rural Midlands – couldn't figure out why the best driving road in the known universe had been overlooked. What could be wrong with the Fosse Way, that storied stretch of old Roman magnificence that curves, rises and scythes its way across middle England, on an almost perfect north-east-to-south-west diagonal, like a glistening ribbon of fat through a porterhouse steak? Too busy? Too straight? Not pretty enough? Piffle.

How could there possibly be 10 better driving roads in the UK? Back then, I was convinced that there couldn't possibly be. Now? Let's say I'm a little wiser and better travelled – and not quite so righteously indignant. But the Fosse Way still holds a very special place in my heart, much as it's now even busier than it was and, as anyone connected with JLR will know rather too well, has been dug up, punted around, remodelled and resurfaced more times in recent years than befits a national treasure.

Land Rovers are the native species around these parts

> **"Too busy? Too straight? Not pretty enough? Piffle"**

The Fosse Way isn't like other roads. It has several numbers for starters: A46, B4114, A429, A433, A367, to name but a few. It has junctions with equally wonderful other Roman roads: Watling Street, Ermin Street, Akeman Street.

And to drive: even on a bad day, there's an unmistakable air of doggedness and soaring indomitability about the way it imposes itself on the landscape. There's a distinctly fast-European feel about the radii of the curves, when they do appear, and a striking sense that, when there's a gradient to be climbed, it will be climbed bloody directly and then ridden on the way down again like a crest of a tidal bore. Also, it's, erm, quite straight in places, which means there's – whisper it – overtaking to be had. Yes, even in 2024.

There's also a sentimental element at play for me, because the Fosse Way wriggles right past the house where I grew up. And so when I passed my driving test, aged 17, it was this road's own special brand from which I drank my first few hundred miles of motoring freedom.

The Fosse Way might just have made me a petrolhead – and even today it's still a rewardingly carpe diem sort of drive.

What we did this week

SPLASH AND DASH

It's not easy keeping cars clean for photoshoots at this time of year. One way around that for the already filthy Alpine A290 on our Car of the Year shoot (p48) was to double down on the filthiness for its set of pictures, and make things even worse. It looked every bit the rally car after a water splash presented itself on our test route. Great fun, too. **MARK TISSHAW**

GETTY IMAGES

BMW HITS THE BIG SCREEN

To showcase its new iDrive operating system (see p12), BMW made members of the media walk through a shrinking machine that turned them ant-sized, so they could see the new system in detail. Okay, they made a big dashboard that filled a stage. But the commitment to the gimmick included safety cards warning of the perils of pigeons and other dangers. **JAMES ATTWOOD**

MONDEO MAN BULKS UP

Travelodge

You've got 800 miles of motorway driving to do in a week: which car are you picking? I know none of you said a Jeep Wrangler, and for good reason. But despite it being as wild and uncompromising on the road as it is capable off it, this beefy 4x4 proved a comfortable and composed companion for a schlep up and down Britain. Hardly Repmobile of the Year, but credit where it's due. **WILL RIMELL**

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